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# ANTHOLOGY

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# ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY

SPRING-  
SUMMER  
1974

EDITED BY

*"Ellery Queen"*

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Dear Reader:

This is the 27th in *EQMM*'s series of original paperback anthologies, now published twice a year . . .

In the two immediately preceding volumes — numbers 25 and 26 — we tried a pair of editorial experiments. In Volume 25 we included 5 brand-new stories never before published in any form. Reader reaction is still inconclusive — evenly divided among those who prefer the new, those who prefer the best of the old, and those who prefer a combination of the old and the new.

In Volume 26 we gave you 7 complete short novels — no short stories or novelets. It is too soon to weigh reader reaction to this variation in policy, and if we decide to repeat the experiment, it is too soon to have gathered another group of 7 short novels by outstanding mystery writers.

So for this volume we return to the main sources of the previous anthologies in this series. Again we give you an assortment of lengths — short stories, novelets, and short novels — changes in reading pace to suit every taste. And again we highlight world-famous series detectives and counterspies — such as, in this volume

Georges Simenon's Inspector Maigret  
Michael Gilbert's Calder and Behrens  
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Harry Kemelman's Nicky Welt  
Kelley Roos's Jeff and Haila Troy  
Ellery Queen's E.Q.

And again we highlight such well-known masters and mistresses of mystery as

Erle Stanley Gardner

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Robert Twohy

As in the 26 earlier anthologies of this series we have selected only those stories that meet the standards of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* as maintained so scrupulously these past 33 years — only top quality or top professionalism of writing, only superior originality or superior craftsmanship in plotting. And none of the 3 short novels, 3 novelets, and 7 short stories in this book has ever appeared in any of the 67 anthologies previously edited by

ELLERY QUEEN

# Erle Stanley Gardner

## The Clue of the Hungry Horse

*The creator of Perry Mason now offers you an entirely different kind of detective. . . Meet Sheriff Bill Eldon of Rockville, California—slow, relaxed, his voice drawling, his manner elaborately casual—a kindly and sympathetic man—a meditative man—a man who can say (and mean every syllable), “I don’t ever aim to back up from anything I think is right.”*

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*A short novel, complete in this anthology. . .*

### **Detective: SHERIFF BILL ELDON**

**I**t was 7:55 when Lew Turlock answered the phone and was advised that long distance was calling Miss Betty Turlock. Would he please put her on the phone?

“She isn’t here.”

The voice of the operator had that synthetic sweetness which showed Lew Turlock he was talking directly with the city. The Rockville operator would have spoken more naturally. Sometimes the local girls tried to imitate the voices of the big-city operators, but it never quite clicked, probably because they overdid it.

“When will she be in?” came drifting dulcetly over the party line.

Lew called over his shoulder to his wife, “Betty wasn’t coming home tonight, was she, Millie?”

“She’s spending the night with Rose Marie Mallard,” his wife called. “Who wants her?”

“Long distance,” Turlock said to his wife and then into the phone, “She won’t be here tonight.”

“Is there another number where we can reach her?”

“Nope,” Turlock said, “no other number. The folks out

where she's staying don't have a telephone."

He hung up and went back to a perusal of the *Rockville Gazette*.

"Now who in the world do you suppose would be calling Betty from the city?" Mrs. Turlock asked.

Her husband merely grunted.

"Seems as though you could have found out who it was," she said. "Betty wouldn't sleep a wink if she knew someone was trying to get her from the city."

Lew started to say something, then lowered his paper and cocked his head, listening.

"What is it?" his wife asked.

"Those horses over at Calhoun's," Turlock said, "they're acting mighty queer. A lot of snorting and stamping."

"Well," Mrs. Turlock said tartly, "let Sid Rowan worry about that. We've got enough to do without worrying about the neighbors' horses. Sid's getting lazier every day. Anyhow, I don't see how you can hear them. I can't hear a thing."

Turlock said shortly, "Just guess my ears are tuned to horse noises. That mare of Lorraine Calhoun's is a package of dynamite. Sounds like she's kicking the side of her stall."

With the boom in land values Lew's next-door neighbor had sold out six months ago to Carl

Carver Calhoun, a wealthy broker. It had been difficult for Turlock to adjust himself to this new situation. In the first place, Calhoun was only there on week-ends. He had hired Sid Rowan and his wife to look after the place, paying a salary that Turlock was firmly convinced was exactly twice as much as any couple were worth, four times as much as Rowan was worth.

Under the new owner the adjoining property had undergone a steady transformation. The cattle and work horses had been sold, and high-spirited riding horses had taken their place. A couple of dairy cows had been retained and a half dozen head of beef cattle, but the rest had been sold. A tennis court had been built and a swimming pool was now in process of construction.

Calhoun was cordial enough. In fact, he went out of his way to be friendly. But, as Turlock had pointed out to his wife, you just couldn't make a real neighbor out of a millionaire. "Go over to borrow a cup of rice," he had pointed out, "and when you went to pay it back, like as not they'd smile and say, 'Oh, that's all right.'"

The telephone rang again.

This time the voice of the long-distance telephone operator announced that her party



would speak with anyone who answered the phone. A second later, a girl's voice, touched with impatience, asked, "Who is this talking, please?"

"Lew Turlock."

"Oh, you're Betty's father, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Look, would you do something for me?"

"What is it?"

"You don't know me. I'm Irma Jessup, a friend of Lorraine Calhoun and also of your daughter. Now listen, it's very important that I talk with Betty. I have to reach her no matter where she is."

"There isn't a phone out where she's staying."

"I understand. But is it far from where you are?"

"Six or seven miles."

"Look, could you get word to her? Or perhaps some neighbor who has a phone would call her? Couldn't you get word to her *some way*?"

"Well, I suppose I could," Turlock said reluctantly, "if it's downright important."

"Well, it is. Just tell her to call Irma Jessup at Trinidad 6273. And she'll be using a neighbor's telephone, won't she?"

"Yes."

"Then tell her to reverse the charges so there won't be any trouble about that. Tell her I'll

be waiting right here at the telephone."

"You want to give me that number again?"

The voice was impatient with the delay and Lew Turlock's stupidity. "It's a pay station, Trinidad 6273. Tell her that Irma Jessup wants her to call at once. I'll be waiting by the telephone. She may call me collect. Now is that plain?"

Turlock sighed. "That's plain," he said. "Goodbye."

"What is it?" Mrs. Turlock called from the living room as Turlock hung up the phone.

"Oh, some friend of the Calhouns—girl by the name of Irma Jessup—says she has to get Betty right away. It's terribly important. I suppose it's an invitation to a theater party or something. Don't know why I didn't make her tell me what it was all about."

"You aren't going out there?"

"I think Jim Thornton will run over and get her for me. It's only a quarter of a mile from his place over there... Say, what do you suppose is the matter with those horses? Guess I'd better go take a look. Don't see any lights over there. I s'pose Sid Rowan and his wife have gone to the movies again."

"Oh, quit worrying about the horses," Mrs. Turlock said. "You can't do your work and Sid's too."

"You know Jim Thornton's number?" Turlock called to his wife.

"Six seven four—ring three."

"Okay."

Turlock picked up the telephone. When he had Jim Thornton on the line, he said, "Jim, this is Lew Turlock. I hate to bother you, but Betty's staying over with Rose Marie Mallard tonight. Long distance is trying to get her and says it's real important. Now, do you suppose you could. . ."

"Sure thing," Thornton said. "I'll get 'em over here right away."

"It ain't too much trouble?"

"Shucks, no. I have a signal with them. I put up an old automobile spotlight on the side of the house. It's pointed right toward their windows and whenever someone wants one of them on the phone, I turn on that spotlight. It may take a few minutes for them to see it, but usually someone comes right over. Usually it's Rose Marie. I'll switch on the light right away, Lew. How's everything coming?"

"So-so."

"Don't want to sell that Jersey milk cow, do you? I know a man who's trying to buy up some good cows, willing to pay a good price."

"How much?"

Thornton's voice became

suddenly cautious, indicating his recognition of the fact that they were talking on a party line. "Remember my telling you what I got for that bay horse?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, he's offered five dollars less than that for the right sort of cows."

"I'll think it over. Probably be seeing you tomorrow."

"Okay. Be seeing you."

Turlock hung up. Within a matter of five minutes the phone was ringing again.

"That'll be Betty now," Mrs. Turlock said.

Lew Turlock put down his paper and walked patiently over to the telephone. When Betty was home, she always answered the telephone. When she was away, her father took over the job. Mrs. Turlock had a slight impediment of hearing which, as she expressed it, "made the words sound all blurred over the telephone." But there were those who claimed she could hear all right when it came to listening in on party-line conversations.

Lew Turlock picked up the receiver and said, "Hello."

The voice which came rushing at him over the wire showed all of the nervous rapidity of a person who has an explanation to make and is very anxious to be certain it is accepted.

"Oh, Mr. Turlock," the voice pleaded. "This is Rose Marie. Betty isn't here right now. She's going to join me a little later. There was something came up. She is coming out almost... well, almost any time now. If you can leave the message, I'll see that she gets it."

Lew Turlock gripped the telephone receiver. He started to ask a question and then realized that there were other ears on the party line. This would make a choice morsel of gossip. Magnified, distorted, repeated, it would brand his daughter as a girl who resorted to the familiar expedient of saying she was spending a night with a girl friend who would give her an alibi and then. . .

Lew Turlock fought to keep his voice casual. "Tell her Irma Jessup called up and wants Betty to call back just as soon as she possibly can. She's to put the call through collect. Trinidad 6273. That's all. I'm sorry I bothered you but Irma Jessup said it was terribly important. I told her that I couldn't reach Betty until later on in the evening."

"Okay. I'll. . . I'll tell her—" Rose Marie stammered.

"Thanks," Lew interrupted, keeping his voice casual, and hung up.

It took two or three seconds for him to compose himself

sufficiently to walk back to the living room and face his wife. But Mrs. Turlock was engrossed in her book and barely looked up. She took it for granted that Rose Marie had promised to drive back to her home and relay the message to Betty.

Lew stood, debating just what to do next. His mind was a turmoil of thought, but all the time he was fighting to keep his manner and speech completely casual.

Across on the Calhoun place a horse snorted and kicked. The wind was from the east, carrying the sound plainly. Lew Turlock welcomed it as a diversion. "I'm going across and take a look at those horses," he said. "One of them may have a foot caught or something."

"Sid Rowan certainly doesn't believe in doing any more work than is necessary to get by," Mrs. Turlock snorted. "I can't say that I like the idea of having neighbors who go away and leave the place in the hands of someone like Sid Rowan. After all, the Calhouns aren't there over five or six days a month. And when they are, there's a continual screeching and shouting."

"I know," Lew said, and opened the table drawer to take out a flashlight. "I'll be back in five or ten minutes."

As Lew Turlock crossed the

kitchen and opened the back door, his wife was saying something about Sid Rowan traipsing off to a movie three or four nights a week and delegating his responsibilities to the neighbors. Having warmed to this subject, she found it more interesting than her book.

Turlock quietly closed the back door, shutting off his wife's tirade.

The boundary line between the Turlock and Calhoun properties ran directly across the crest of a commanding knoll. For this reason the houses were nearer together than would otherwise have been the case, each builder desiring to take advantage of the view and the cool breezes.

Using the beam of his flashlight to guide him, Lew Turlock crossed the narrow strip of lawn, opened the gate in the fence, and approached the Calhoun barn.

It had been raining earlier in the day, but now the clouds had broken up. The stars were gleaming brightly, interrupted only by an occasional blotch of drifting clouds. The air, washed clean of impurities by the rain, felt cool and crisp. The smell of damp earth was a delightful aroma in Turlock's nostrils. It exerted a quieting influence, stilling somewhat the thoughts

which raced around and around in his brain like a weary squirrel wheel of worry.

Lew Turlock knew he must make some excuse to get out to George Mallard's place. Somehow, he must get Rose Marie off to one side and quiz her before she had had a chance to get in touch with Betty and fix up some story. That, Turlock decided, was the Calhoun influence. Lorraine Calhoun's smilingly superior manners had started all the girls putting on airs, trying to be sophisticated. Take Rosemary, for instance, who had ceased to be plain "Rosemary" but must now be called Rose Marie. Her parents had no business letting her get away with that stuff. If he'd been her father. . .

Lew, walking doggedly toward the barn, his mind occupied with his own problems, noticed that the beam of his flashlight was reflected back at him from the chrome finish on a convertible car, parked almost in front of the stable door.

He let the light play over the car. It was Lorraine Calhoun's convertible. The top was down, showing the red leather of the interior—a car, Lew thought morosely, that cost more than a Diesel tractor—and used just as a plaything—to speed a rich man's daughter around on her

playtime engagements.

A horse snorted and kicked.

Lew Turlock opened the barn door. Somewhere at the back of the barn a horse gave a low nicker in appreciation of the human companionship.

Turlock, accustomed to sensing the moods of animals, detected the tension all up and down the long line of stalls. The horses were nervous, as though a thunderstorm had been approaching.

A horse snorted. Lew could hear the iron ring turn in its hasp as the horse lunged back on the rope. Then there was the sound of nervous hoofs on the wood floor of the stall and another long snort.

Lew found the light switch and clicked on the lights.

With the blaze of illumination the horses instantly became silent.

Lew's eyes, running down the long line of stalls, caught sight of a girl's leg and a high-heeled shoe, the toe pointed slightly upward. Beyond that, he could see part of a hand stretched out, palm upward.

Even in the first moment of soul-numbing excitement, Turlock remembered about the horses. He mustn't alarm them. He spoke to them as he hurried down the line of stalls. "Whoa, boys, take it easy. Steady."

She was lying on her side, sprawled out grotesquely, in such a position that the mare had to stand at an angle to avoid trampling the still body.

The cruel, disfiguring wound in the top of her head, with the sinister red pool seeping from it onto the stable floor, told its own story.

Lew gave a strangled cry, "Betty!"

He knelt by the girl, then noticed her clothes. They were not Betty's clothes.

"Miss Calhoun—Lorraine," he said.

The figure lay starkly still. Lew touched the arm.

It needed only that one touch of the lifeless flesh to tell Lew Turlock that nothing he could do would be of any use.

He left the body exactly as he had found it, but he carefully stepped over it, untied the mare and led her out.

The nervous mare drew back on the rope as she came to the sprawled figure, then reared and jumped, alighting with a pound of hoofs on the floor beyond.

Lew tied her up and then went to the extension telephone which Calhoun had had installed in his barn within the last two weeks.

Sheriff Bill Eldon received the call at his home. He was, at the moment, suffering through

one of the frequent visits of his wife's sister, Doris. Time did not dull the sharpness of her mind—or of her tongue.

The Sheriff listened to Lew Turlock's heavy voice stolidly giving him the details.

"You say she was kicked by the mare?"

"That's what it looked like. She must have gone into the stall and the mare caught her right in the middle of the forehead."

"You didn't move her?"

"Well, I got her out of that stall."

"You shouldn't have done that, Lew. You should have left the body..."

"Not the body," Lew said, "the mare. She was stomping around and all excited."

"You didn't move the body?"

"Shucks, no. The mare jumped over it slick as could be. I knew enough not to touch the body. So did the mare."

"How about the Calhouns? Are they home?" the Sheriff asked.

"No, no one's home. Sid Rowan and his wife must have gone to the show."

"Okay," the Sheriff said. "I'll get the Coroner and come out. I'll call up the theater and tell them to put a message on the screen for Sid Rowan to get out there right away. See that

no one touches anything. G'bye."

Doris Nelson was sitting in the front parlor, straining her ears to listen. She waited only to hear the click of the receiver and then rasped out, "Who is it? Who's killed? What happened?"

Grinning maliciously, the Sheriff picked up the receiver again. His second call would give him a valid excuse to ignore the questions. He said to the operator, "Get me James Logan, the Coroner, right away. It's official and important."

A few moments later the Sheriff had notified the Coroner, called the movie theater, and left instructions to have Sid Rowan called from the show. Then he had slipped out of the side door and got his car out of the driveway—all without answering Doris' rapid-fire staccato of eager questions, in itself no small feat.

Logan, the Coroner, and Lew Turlock both lived well to the south of town. The Turlock ranch was some five miles out, and the Sheriff, taking it for granted that Logan would be there ahead of him, drove at conservative speed along the main street of Rockville, carefully regarding the rights of other cars that were on the road. Although he had switched on his official red spotlight, he



refrained from using the siren. After all, there was nothing he could do. The girl was dead.

The Calhouns were prominent people. There would be quite a bit of publicity over the thing. The city newspapers would probably telephone in for complete facts. The Calhoun girl was pretty as a picture. But she was a city girl, and she should have known better than to go prowling around a nervous mare at night.

Once south of town, the Sheriff speeded up the car and rolled briskly along the pavement. As he turned off on the dirt road which led up to the hill where the two houses were situated, he noticed that there were several fresh car tracks just ahead of him and that one of the puddles left in the road was still churned with yellowish muddy water. This meant that the Coroner would be there ahead of him.

The Sheriff liked that. He was always nervous when he had to stand around waiting for the Coroner. He turned up the driveway, which skirted the base of the hill, then climbed up to the knoll, and slid his car to a stop just behind that of the Coroner.

Logan was already in the barn. The Sheriff walked on in.

Logan said, "I've looked around, Bill. It's evidently

accidental. She went into the stall to get something and the mare kicked her. It must have happened right after the horses were fed. The mare got nervous with the body lying there and didn't eat a bite. The chute is still filled with hay. That mare's hot-blooded and nervous. Miss Calhoun probably didn't know enough about horses to understand she had to speak to a horse when she entered the stall. She walked in without saying a word. The mare saw her out of the corner of her eye and let fly."

"How long's she been dead?" the Sheriff asked.

"We can find out when Sid Rowan comes and tells us what time he fed the horses. Must've happened within five minutes of the time he put down the feed. This probably will be Sid now."

A car drew up outside. A man and woman got out and entered the stable.

"What's the trouble here?" Sid Rowan said, his voice showing irritation. "Can't I get away to a movie without..."

He broke off as the Sheriff stepped forward.

Rowan was in the middle fifties, a stringy, wiry man with steel-gray eyes, long of leg and arm but quick-moving despite an awkward shuffle about his walk. His wife was four or five

years younger and inclined to be fleshy and slow-moving.

The Sheriff told them what had happened.

"But she wasn't here," Rowan said. "There was no one here. No one was home. The family were coming down tomorrow! You know how it is. They used to come down every week-end, now they come down about two week-ends out of the month, the whole bunch of them—servants, family, friends. Three or four automobile-loads sometimes. Shucks, wait a minute, that's her car parked out there now. She must have come down unexpected."

"You didn't know she was here?"

"Why, no. I didn't look for her until tomorrow. They're all coming then."

"You have no idea what time she got here?"

"No."

"You must have fed the horses and then gone to the movies as soon as you had the hay down."

"That's right. I went up and put hay in the chutes and then the missus and I beat it for the first show. No sense in sticking around here all the time. You can't make a man work both day and night."

"You must have fed at about half-past six if you made the first show?"

"I started about half-past six. Guess I finished about twenty minutes of seven and took right off."

"It was dark in the barn by that time?"

"Sure."

"And you switched on the lights?"

"Of course."

"And then turned them off when you left?"

"That's right."

"Did she have a key to the house?"

"I suppose so. Sure. Calhoun had keys made for all members of the family."

"Do you live in the house or..."

"No. There's an apartment over the garage where the wife and I live."

Logan said, "Well, we don't know *why* she came to the stable, but it's a cinch she came here, walked in, and the mare kicked her."

Sid Rowan nodded.

"I'm not so sure," Sheriff Eldon said.

They looked at him quizzically. "How else could it have happened, Bill?" the Coroner asked.

Bill Eldon turned to Turlock.

"You heard the horses snorting?" the Sheriff asked.

"That's right. This mare was making quite a commotion."

snorting and stamping and occasionally kicking at the side of the stall. She wanted out." "She was tied up with a rope?"

"That's right. A halter and a rope through that iron ring."

"How long had you been hearing that racket before you came over?"

"Must have been half an hour anyway. Maybe longer."

"You called me at eight twenty-five," the Sheriff said. "I made a note of the time."

"Well, I called you within five minutes of the time I got over here."

"Now then, when you got here," the Sheriff said, "the table was dark?"

"That's right."

"You had a flashlight and located the light switch and turned on the lights?"

"Yes."

"And the body was lying here on the floor?"

"That's right."

The Sheriff turned to Logan. "There you are."

"I don't get it," Logan told him.

"Rowan left the place at twenty minutes to seven," the Sheriff said. "It was dark by that time. The sun sets right around six o'clock. Inside the barn it was dark as a pocket. You couldn't see your way around without lights. Now

then, if this young woman entered the barn, she naturally turned on the lights to see where she was going. Who turned off those lights?"

"Gosh, Bill, you've got something there," the Coroner said. "There must have been someone with her."

"That's right, someone who turned off the lights."

Logan gave a low whistle.

"After this had happened," the Sheriff went on.

Logan looked at Rowan. "No chance she got in while you were feeding the horses and then when you went out—"

"Not a chance in the world," Rowan interrupted half-angrily.

Logan motioned toward the horse's manger. "The horse hasn't hardly touched a bit of food... This is Lorraine Calhoun, Rowan?"

"Sure. She must have driven up right after I left. After I came down that ladder from the loft, I remember looking in at the mare. She'd just started to eat."

The Sheriff avoided the body by hugging the edge of the stall. He walked in to the manger and said, "The chute's pretty well clogged up with hay. That mare didn't even pull the hay away from the bottom of the chute so the rest of it could come down."

The Sheriff picked up half a

dozen of the dried barley stalks and looked at the quality of hay with a professional eye. "Lots of grain on this hay," he said. "It's pretty good. . . Hello, what *this*?"

His flashlight exploring the far corner of the manger disclosed a small black leather-covered book, blending so perfectly with the shadows in the manger that it took the beam of the flashlight to disclose it.

Bill Eldon picked up the book and turned his body so the light struck the pages. "Seems to be a diary," he said. "Her name's in front—Lorraine Calhoun. Logan, if you don't mind, I think I'll get Quinlan to take some photographs of the position of that body. Let's try not to touch anything until he gets down here."

The Sheriff moved over directly under the light. Opening the diary, he said, "Gosh, I hate to pry into this thing. Guess we won't read it, boys."

He started to put it in his pocket and then said, "Well, we might take a look at the *last* entry in it. It may tell us something."

The Sheriff turned to the current date, opened the diary, and read, "*I guess some people think I'm a fool. I'm going to have a showdown with Frank and that mealy-mouthed Betty*

*tomorrow. Well, why wait? Why not catch. . .*"

That ended the last entry.

The Sheriff abruptly closed the book and put it in his pocket. He turned to Lew Turlock. "Where's Betty tonight, Lew?" he asked casually.

Lew Turlock fidgeted uneasily. He glanced over toward his house, and then his eyes met the curious gaze of James Logan, Sid Rowan, and Rowan's wife.

"Sheriff," he blurted, "could I speak with you alone—sort of private like?"

Over in the dark corner of the barn Lew Turlock told the Sheriff the story of his daughter's deception.

"Told you she was going out with the Mallard girl, did she?" the Sheriff asked.

Turlock nodded miserably. "She and Rosemary—or Rose Marie she's calling herself now—were supposed to be working on some stuff they're doing in this benefit play for the Red Cross. She left right after supper."

"What time?"

"Well, Millie had dinner early so Betty could get away. I guess Betty left the place about—well, about six. She helped her mother with the dishes. But she was all ready to go except for that. Soon as she

dried the dishes she jumped in the car and drove away."

"And Mallard hasn't any telephone?"

"That's right. I called up by getting Jim Thornton to signal him to come over to the phone. Betty's a good girl. I don't know what it's all about. Probably some kid stuff. But if word gets around that Betty's supposed to be there, but ain't—well, you can look at Sid Rowan's wife, standing over there with her ears stuck out a foot—"

"Come on," the Sheriff said. "We're going out to Mallard's place right quick."

He called back over his shoulder, "Lew Turlock and I are going out to see if his daughter saw Lorraine tonight. She's visiting friends who haven't any phone. Jim, will you get in touch with George Quinlan and ask him to come down and take some pictures of that body and the stall? Make everyone keep back away from the body!"

The Sheriff opened the door of the county car and Lew Turlock, miserably dejected, climbed in beside the Sheriff. "Gosh, Bill," he said, "you know how easy it is to get talk started around here. Particularly with someone like Sid Rowan's wife. She's all burned up with curiosity right now."

"I know," Bill Eldon said sympathetically.

"Matter of fact, I thought there for a minute it was Betty lying dead in the barn. The light's down at the far end, and what with the shadows in the stall and the body lying sort of half face-down—you can imagine how I felt. Hang it, Bill, Betty is all right. I don't know what the explanation is but—"

"Sure, sure," the Sheriff soothed. "You're getting yourself all worried, Lew. Betty's all right, but if this Lorraine Calhoun was going to see her tonight, we'd sort of ought to talk with Betty. I haven't ever met any of these Calhouns. Too bad a thing like this had to happen. Guess the country's changing, Lew. Must have been fifty little ranches sold to city people. Some of the folks are going to farm, but most of 'em are just using 'em for sort of week-end residences."

His manner casual, his voice drawling characteristically, the Sheriff talked on, steering the conversation away from the gnawing worry that was eating away at Turlock's mind.

They passed Jim Thornton's house, rolled on down the dirt road another quarter of a mile, and then turned into Mallard's place.

George Mallard came out to meet them.

The Sheriff did the talking, for which Lew Turlock was duly grateful. And the Sheriff was diplomatic, asking about the crops, discussing the prospects of early rains, and then casually asking whether Rosemary was home.

"Rose Marie," Mallard corrected him with a grin. "She's gone a little highfalutin on us. No, she ain't home. Someone telephoned to her about three quarters of an hour ago maybe, and she jumped in the car and went tearing out."

The Sheriff was elaborately casual. "Well, that's all right," he said. "She's going to be in that Red Cross play next month, isn't she?"

"That's right."

"She and Betty Turlock."

"Uh huh."

"Kind of want to see her about the play," the Sheriff said. "Haven't any idea where she went, have you, George?"

"No, I haven't. You know the way youngsters are these days. She came tearing in, grabbed her hat and coat, bounced into the car, and tore out of the driveway. These kids have more on their minds these days than the Governor of the state."

The Sheriff started the motor on his car. "Well, I'll be seeing you, George, I'm kinda busy right now. Tell your

daughter just as soon as she comes in to call my house. No, wait a minute. . . You tell her to jump in the car and come to my office."

Mallard looked curious. "What is it? Anything—"

The Sheriff's grin was reassuring. "This doggone Red Cross play is going to have us all jumping until it comes off, I guess. Bet your daughter looks good in it. Can't tell what will happen one of these days with a good-looking girl like that. She might be on the stage in one of these little local plays and some movie scout might see her, and next thing you know, she'd be in Hollywood."

"I don't want Rose Marie in Hollywood," George Mallard said positively.

"I know," the Sheriff grinned, "but you just can't tell."

He turned the car around and was fifty yards from the house when a car speeding along the paved road slowed so rapidly that the tires screamed a protest and turned into the driveway.

"Reckon this here is Rosemary now," Bill Eldon said, "and she's got Betty with her."

Lew Turlock heaved a sigh of relief.

The Sheriff drove slowly, found a place on the side of the dirt road where he could park,



and blinked his lights to signal the oncoming car.

"Maybe you'd better do the first part of the talking," Eldon said to Turlock.

Lew Turlock nodded. He got out of the car, crossed in front of the headlights, and was waiting by the side of the road when Rose Marie drew abreast.

Illumination from the instrument light in the dashboard showed that a beautiful blonde girl with deep blue eyes and smooth, fine-textured skin was at the wheel, alone in the car.

Lew Turlock stepped forward. "Hello," he said somewhat inanely, his eyes going past Rose Marie to the empty seat beside her.

"Oh," she said. "It's . . . Mr. Turlock. . . How do you do, Mr. Turlock. Oh, I'm sorry. I hope you didn't come out here just to—"

"Where is Betty?" Turlock asked.

She shifted her position behind the steering wheel. She frowned for a moment, then smiled, and said, "Oh, she'll be along. She's right behind me."

The Sheriff slid out from behind the steering wheel. "Hello, Rose Marie," he said. "Just where is Betty?"

Rose Marie Mallard looked from one man to the other. The deep blue eyes showed sudden panic. The pathetic attempt at a

smile was wiped off her face.

"Where is she?" the Sheriff asked, and then added, "Right now. I want to see her."

Rose Marie's words were hardly audible above the purr of the idling motor.

"I don't know," she said. "I've been trying to find her."

The Sheriff's voice hardened. "Now let's be frank," he said. "Suppose you tell me all you know about Betty Turlock."

"I don't know a thing. She was to be here. . . a little later."

"And spend the night with you?"

"Yes."

"What time was she supposed to be here?"

"She. . . well, later."

"How much later?"

"I don't know. I don't know as *she* did."

The Sheriff said, "There's been an accident over at Calhoun's. We're looking for Betty, and other people are going to be looking for Betty maybe. It's going to be kind of too bad if no one seems to know right where she is. Particularly because Betty's mother's going to say she's over here working on that play."

"An accident, Sheriff?"

"Lorraine Calhoun's been killed."

"Lorraine! Oh, but Betty *couldn't* have done anything like that!"

"Like what?"

"Why, killing. . . You said it was an accident?"

"A horse kicked her, yes."

Rose Marie's exclamation was an "Oh!" which indicated great relief.

"Now after you got that telephone call from Lew here," the Sheriff said, "you jumped in your car and went out to try and find Betty, didn't you?"

There was a moment's hesitancy, then a reluctant nod.

"Now then," the Sheriff said, "let's not get into any more trouble, Rose Marie. Where did you go?"

"Out—out along the river road."

"You were looking for her parked in an automobile?"

"Yes."

"Whose automobile?"

"Hers—that is, Mr. Turlock's."

"And who did you expect would be with her?"

"Why. . . I was just looking for her"

There was a note of impatience in the Sheriff's voice. "You tell us the facts," he said, "and let us do the thinking. We're all friends of Betty's and we don't any one of us want to see a lot of talk get started. Now, you don't need to try to cover up things from us. You tell us the truth, only tell it to us fast."

She said, "She was to meet Frank Garwin tonight."

"Who's Garwin?" the Sheriff asked.

It was Lew Turlock who answered the question. "Friend of the Calhouns," he said.

The Sheriff studied Lew Turlock's face for a moment, then turned back to Rose Marie Mallard. "You tell us," he said.

Her voice was thin with fright, but she said readily enough, "When the Calhouns bought the place and moved in, Lorraine was spending the summer - up in Maine with friends. She only got back here about three weeks ago. Frank Garwin is a friend of—well, a friend of the family. He. . . they all sort of like him and. . . He wanted to be a lawyer and he and Lorraine were going together steady and then—well, he didn't have the money for an education and Lorraine loaned him enough to get himself through college and. . ."

"How about the army? Was he. . ."

"No, he has a bad heart. He stayed on and studied and—well, he got to seeing something of Betty. . . It's a mix-up. I don't know too much about it. All I know is they're miserable."

"Who's miserable?"

"Both of them."

"Lorraine?"

Rose Marie lashed out bitterly at that name. "Not Lorraine," she said. "She was playing around in Maine and that's why she didn't want to come back to California when her folks bought this place. If you ask me, I think she came back to give Frank Garwin the gate. And then she saw how things were and she just decided to play dog in the manger. Not that she cares a thing in the world about Frank, but it's her own pride, her own selfishness, her own conceit. She couldn't stand the idea of having some other girl take a boy friend away from her, the great Lorraine Calhoun—sophisticated, polished, traveled, patronizing, snobbish little—"

"She's dead," the Sheriff reminded her.

"I'm sorry. I forgot. I—well, I'm sorry."

Suddenly a light blazed into brilliance ahead.

"That's Mr. Thornton," Rose Marie said desperately. "He does that whenever someone wants us on the phone. That's probably Betty now."

They waited while she turned her car and then followed her to Thornton's house. But it wasn't Betty Turlock on the phone. It was long distance again, Irma Jessup calling. It seemed she had once more called Turlock's residence

and Mrs. Turlock, innocently enough, had told the operator Betty could be reached through the Thornton residence.

Sheriff Eldon stepped to the telephone. "Hello," he said.

The woman's voice at the other end of the line said impatiently, "I didn't want to talk with you again, I—"

"Now listen to me a minute," Eldon said. "This is the Sheriff talking. There's been an accident over at the Calhoun place and—"

He ceased talking as he heard the receiver at the other end of the line dropped on the hook. The line went abruptly dead.

Bill Eldon sat in the Sheriff's office in the courthouse, a reading light flooding the battered desk where he had spread out the diary of Lorraine Calhoun.

The door opened and George Quinlan came breezing in.

"You get those pictures?" the Sheriff asked.

"Pictures of the whole business," Quinlan said. "We've turned the body over to the doctor. I got C.C. Calhoun himself on the phone. He should be here any time now. He's all broken up. He didn't know his daughter was here. She'd gone out for the evening.

Steps ascending the uncarpeted wooden stairs of the

courthouse sounded abnormally loud against the background of night-time silence.

"This may be Calhoun now," Quinlan said.

"Sounds like there are two of them," the Sheriff said.

The door was pushed open, and a tall distinguished man strode into the room. "My name's Calhoun," he said. "I want to see the Sheriff."

Calhoun's wavy hair was touched with gray. His regular features, carefully groomed appearance, and well-modulated voice gave him an air of quiet authority. He was wearing a pearl-gray double-breasted suit with a light topcoat of about the same color.

Bill Eldon got up from behind his desk and held out his hand. "I'm Eldon, the Sheriff," he said. "Mighty sorry to have to meet you under circumstances like this, Mr. Calhoun."

Calhoun surveyed him with large dark eyes and shook hands. Then he stood slightly to one side and indicated another man standing just behind him in the doorway.

"Mr. Parnell," he said, "one of my business associates. He's going to take charge of—of details."

Parnell, square-jawed and coldly direct of eye, was a few years younger than Calhoun. He had put on weight which the

careful tailoring of an expensive double-breasted suit could soften, but not entirely hide.

Once more the Sheriff shook hands and introduced Quinlan, the Deputy Sheriff. The four men sat down.

"Suppose you tell us about it," Calhoun said, after a few preliminaries.

The Sheriff briefly outlined what had happened.

Calhoun shook his head. "I simply can't believe it."

The Sheriff's voice showed his sympathy. "Her trip down here seems to have been sorta unexpected."

"It must have been. We were all intending to come tomorrow. But then Lorraine had her own car and was free to do as she pleased."

"Twenty-one?" the Sheriff asked.

"Going on twenty-two."

The Sheriff said, "Just as a matter of routine, I'm going to have to ask you to go down and identify the body and... well, you know how it is. There's a lot of formality to be gone through."

Parnell broke into the thread of the conversation. "That's why I'm along. Times like this, things are pretty tough on a father. I'm prepared to make whatever arrangements are necessary."

Parnell had a rapid-fire

diction, frequently accompanied by swift explanatory gestures. He was exactly the type of man to take charge of details for a bereaved friend and make a good job of it.

"Would you like to go see your daughter now?" the Sheriff asked Calhoun.

"Naturally," Calhoun said shortly and started putting on his gloves.

"Let's get started and get it over with," Parnell said brusquely. "It's a disagreeable duty, but after that's over with, Mr. Calhoun can rest."

"Has the mare been shot?" Calhoun asked.

"Why, no," the Sheriff said in some surprise.

"Don't you shoot vicious animals?"

"Well, now..." The Sheriff hesitated and then went on, "Of course, being as how you were coming down here right away, I wanted to wait and get an authorization from you. After all, the mare—"

"You have my authorization," Calhoun said. "I never want to see that mare again. Shoot her at once, please."

"Well, now, we'd better wait until morning because—"

"I want her shot *tonight*," Calhoun said with cold, implacable hatred behind each word.

The Sheriff nodded to

Quinlan. "Guess you can keep the office for a while, George. We'll go on down and go through the necessary formalities."

Calhoun remained wordless during the trip to the undertaking parlor. And when Bill Eldon introduced him to Logan, the Coroner and town mortician, he merely bowed. Then Carl Carver Calhoun, his face drawn into hard lines of sorrow, bent over the still figure lying on the marble slab.

Suddenly he straightened and turned.

"What's the idea?" he asked coldly. "Where's the other one?"

"The other what?"

"The other body—that of my daughter."

He read his answer in the expression of consternation on the faces of those about him.

"You mean to say *this* is the body you found in my barn?" he asked.

"Isn't that your daughter?" Logan asked.

"Definitely not."

"Do you know who it is?" Bill Eldon asked.

"I not only don't know who it is, but I certainly don't appreciate having been advised that my daughter was dead. I can't, of course, expect urban efficiency here in a rural community, but after all..."

Calhoun controlled himself with an effort, moved his shoulders in an expressive gesture, and turned to his friend, Parnell. "Let's get out of here," he said.

"Just a moment," the Sheriff intervened. "Let's get this thing straight. You're *sure* this isn't your daughter?"

"I guess I should know my own daughter, Sheriff."

The Sheriff turned to Parnell in silent question.

Parnell shook his head. "That's definitely not Lorraine, if that's what you want to know, Sheriff."

"And neither one of you knows who she is?"

"I've never seen her before," Calhoun said.

"Nor I," Parnell added.

The Sheriff moved closer to look down at the body of the young woman.

"How did you happen to make such a ghastly mistake?" Calhoun asked.

"Well, of course," the Sheriff explained, "the way the lights were there in the stable, the face was pretty much in shadow and she was lying more or less face down. And that kick in her forehead and the blood hadn't helped any; but Sid Rowan identified her as Lorraine Calhoun and so did Lew Turlock."

Logan added hastily, "Of

course, when you come right down to it, Bill, Lew Turlock just took a quick look and saw there was a body and ran to notify you on the phone. He never did get a really good look at the face. You remember he thought at first it was his daughter, Betty. And then when Sid Rowan came in, I noticed particularly that he just—well, he wanted to keep away from the place. He really didn't take a *good* look. He just went over and gave a quick glance and said it was Lorraine. I s'pose it was the fact that Miss Calhoun's car was parked out in front of the stable that did it."

The Sheriff said almost musingly, "That sort of ties in all along the line. *Two* people must have gone into that barn. This young woman and someone else."

"Meaning my daughter Lorraine?" Calhoun asked.

"Not meaning anyone yet," the Sheriff said. "Just a person. You see, Mr. Calhoun, the lights weren't on in the barn, so whoever entered must have turned them on."

"Go ahead. Let's hear the rest of it," Calhoun said.

"And another thing," the Sheriff went on. "In the manger of the mare's stall we found your daughter's diary with her name in the front of it. And I guess that sort of helped people



to believe that the girl was your daughter. You see, things were pretty messy there in the stable—well, I can understand how the mistake happened to be made.”

“I can’t,” Calhoun said shortly

“And,” the Sheriff continued, “when Lew Turlock found the body, there weren’t any lights on in the barn. The horses had been stamping around for a while and Turlock had looked out of his window a couple of times in the half hour before he went over to investigate.”

“I don’t see what you’re getting at,” Calhoun said.

“It isn’t hardly reasonable to suppose that this woman was wandering around there in the stable in the dark,” the Sheriff said. “She must have turned on the lights when she went in. And she certainly didn’t turn them off—after this happened. So I sort of figured someone must have been with her and...”

Calhoun interrupted, “Are you trying to insinuate that Lorraine took this girl into the stable and then after an accident of this sort calmly turned around, walked out, turned the lights off, not notified the authorities, not called the doctor, not... Bah!”

“Now just take it easy,” the

Sheriff said. “I’m talking about *somebody*. I haven’t mentioned your daughter’s name a’tall. I’m just talking about somebody that went in the stable with this woman.”

“Well, your meaning is plain enough,” Calhoun said. “Now let’s get this straight, Sheriff. I’m relatively a newcomer in this county but I’m certainly not going to be pushed around. I don’t like your insinuations. The body of this young woman happens to have been found in my stable. I suppose in view of that fact and my prominence in the city, there will be some newspaper comment about this. But let me warn you of one thing. In the event your bungling methods tend to add to that publicity, or make it sensational, or in the event the name of any one of my family is dragged into this thing, you will regret it as long as you live! As a matter of fact, I presume I have an action against you right now if I care to press it. Your slipshod methods have caused me to believe my daughter was dead. I left an important meeting and drove here at breakneck speed only to find myself the victim of a bucolic inefficiency which would have been ludicrous if it weren’t so tragic. I advise you to think that over. Good night, sir.”

Calhoun nodded to Parnell.

The two men started from the undertaking parlor.

After a few steps, however, Parnell turned back. "Let's not have any misunderstanding, boys," he pleaded. "I've known Carl Calhoun for only a relatively short time, but it's been my privilege to know him well. Put yourself in his place. A young woman blunders into his stable and gets kicked by a horse. So far you've bungled things pretty much. From here on, let's get it right. The city newspapers will just give this only a couple of paragraphs if you boys use your heads. If you fellows keep messing it up, you'll stir up trouble. Once some newspaper gets the idea there's any mystery about it, or that Lorraine Calhoun was mixed up in it—well, you can see what will happen then. You can't push Calhoun around and he's nuts about his daughter—so take it easy."

"Where's Lorraine now?" the Sheriff asked.

Parnell's face lost its conciliatory smile and showed irritation. "How the hell should I know? Be your age—or perhaps you'd better try not to be. Damn it all, Sheriff, Lorraine Calhoun would no more have left an injured girl in case there'd been an accident. . ."

Parnell started to say something else, but changed his

mind. Turning away, he hurried after Calhoun.

Logan and the Sheriff exchanged glances.

"Well," Logan said, as the steps down the hallway receded, "it looks as though we got a bear by the tail, Bill."

The Sheriff nodded.

"Of course, he's got us there on that identification business," Logan went on. "When you come right down to it, I'm the one that's responsible for that. You found that diary and there was something in it about Betty Turlock, so then you and Lew went chasing off to find her. I'm the one that's supposed to make the identification, I guess; but what with Lew Turlock and Sid Rowan and her car sitting out in front—well, it's a mistake anybody could have made."

"How about Sid's wife? Didn't she take a look?" the Sheriff asked.

"No, she didn't. After you left, Bill, I kept thinking about George Quinlan coming down and taking pictures, so naturally I was anxious to keep things just the way they were. I kept everyone away from the body. But Mrs. Rowan didn't seem to want to go near the body. I remember noticing it at the time because she's rather a nosey busybody and likes to know everything. They say she's quite a gossip."

Bill Eldon nodded, then stepped over and looked down at the silent body on the slab.

"Dirty shame a girl like this has to die," he said. "She evidently was mighty good-looking, had everything to live for. Nice trim-looking girl. Just a nice-looking girl. Good figure. We've got to find out who she is, how she happened to be in that stable, and who went in there with her."

"You still think someone went in with her, Bill?"

The Sheriff didn't answer for a moment. He was looking at the U-shaped mark left by the horseshoe, almost in the center of the girl's forehead.

"See anything strange about that, Jim?" he asked.

"About what?"

"About that horseshoe mark."

Logan shook his head.

"That's awful high for a mare to kick," the Sheriff said. "And notice that most of the force seems to have been at the upper part of the shoe. Now a horse would have to kick awful high to get a girl on the forehead if she was standing up. And then the force would be on the lower part of the shoe."

"By George, you've got something there!" Logan exclaimed. "The girl must have been down on her hands and knees when she was kicked."

"And another thing," the Sheriff said. "You got a tape measure handy, Jim?"

"I can get one."

"Get it," the Sheriff said.

Logan started down the long passageway toward the front of the building, but after he had taken half a dozen steps, he suddenly turned and came back to the Sheriff.

"Bill," he said, "let's be careful what we do. We're already in a mess. Rush Medford, the District Attorney, doesn't like you. And more than that, he's always catering to people who have money and influence. He's got his eye on a political plum, maybe getting an appointment to one of the upper courts. A man like Calhoun can twist him around his finger."

Bill Eldon, looking down at the dead girl, said nothing. His eyes were half closed in thoughtful concentration.

"Bill Eldon," Logan said irritably, "you listen to me! You ain't as young as you used to be and there's been a lot of talk around about cleaning out the courthouse ring, beginning with you. And you watch Rush Medford. He's a back-stabber if I ever saw one. Back of all that smooth palaver of his, he's just laying for a chance to throw the hooks into you. Now, we've kind of led with our chins on

this one and, the way I see it, the only thing to do is to back up and back up fast. We'll lose a little skin off our noses doing it, but it's better to do that than to lose our heads."

The Sheriff abruptly turned away from the corpse. "Jim," he said; "I don't ever aim to back up from anything that I think is right. Let's go get the tape measure."

He walked with Logan to the front office where the Coroner opened a desk drawer, handed the Sheriff a small steel tape graduated to sixteenths of an inch. "This all right?" he asked.

The Sheriff looked at the tape, nodded, and turned back toward the room in the rear of the establishment.

"Now you look here, Bill," Logan persisted. "Calhoun's on the warpath. Calhoun's got influence. And you just can't go bargain' around—"

The Sheriff walked away while Logan was talking. It wasn't, Logan realized, any intentional discourtesy—merely that the Sheriff had his mind completely centered on something else.

Logan started to follow him, then changed his mind, walked back to the desk, and sat down.

Logan himself held an elective office. Being Coroner made all the difference between

carrying on his undertaking business at a good profit and just being able to eke out a living.

Logan knew what was going to happen in this case. If Bill Eldon didn't back up and back up fast, Calhoun would be after the Sheriff's scalp—might be anyway. Edward Lyons, publisher of the *Rockville Gazette*, had turned against Bill Eldon within the last two years. The first time Lyons had tried to throw the weight of his paper against the Sheriff, Bill Eldon had outfoxed him and neatly turned the tables. Since that time Lyons had been lying low, waiting for his political wounds to heal. But no one who knew Lyons thought for a moment he was finished. He was merely biding his time.

If Jim Logan stayed with the Sheriff on this thing, it would be a question of sink or swim. The time for Logan to bail out was right now. That was the sensible thing to do. All he had to do was to pick up the telephone and call Ed Lyons at the *Rockville Gazette*.

Logan heard the sound of the Sheriff's steps in the corridor. The Sheriff tossed the steel tape measure on Logan's desk.

"That mark of the horseshoe is four and fifteen-sixteenths inches at the widest part, Jim. I

want you to verify that yourself, I'm goin' out."

"Where?"

"Lookin' for a couple who might be doing a little necking. Any suggestions where they might be?"

"The river road," Logan said, his manner preoccupied.

"They ain't there."

"Only other place I know of is the ball park. They go there sometimes."

"Thanks," Eldon said. "I'll try the ball park. Night, Logan."

"Good night, Bill," the Coroner said, not looking up.

The Sheriff left him sitting there at the desk, his eyes on the telephone, indecision in his manner.

The wide gate to the auto entrance of the ball park was propped open and the Sheriff drove in to what seemed a deserted enclosure. But as he swung his car in a wide searching circle, so that the headlights illuminated all parts of the field, he suddenly flushed quarry; an automobile which had been standing in dark silence by the bleachers blazed into brilliance and started for the exit.

The Sheriff moved to head it off. The other car gathered speed. The Sheriff switched on his red spotlight.

The car, bathed in blood-red brilliance, took to headlong flight. It tore past the gate posts, screamed into a turn, and started on the road toward town.

The Sheriff gave it the siren.

The other car kept on. The Sheriff poured gas into the motor of the County car and really settled down to dangerous driving. If the car ahead wanted to play rough, Bill Eldon was willing to do his part.

But the driver of the car ahead was only fairly good at that sort of thing, and it took less than half the distance to town for the Sheriff to work alongside and crowd the other car over to the ditch.

"What's the matter?" the Sheriff asked, rolling down the window of his car. "Can't you folks hear the siren?"

Betty Turlock at the wheel was white-faced with apprehension. She tried to say something but her quivering lips failed.

The Sheriff raised his five-cell flashlight. The searching beam stabbed into the interior of the car. He saw that the back seat was empty and then let the light dwell searchingly on the features of the young man who sat at Betty Turlock's side.

The Sheriff shut off the motor of his car, opened the door, and got out. "You

shouldn't have done that, Betty."

"I—I thought the officers were making a roundup of petting parties. I didn't want to be caught."

The Sheriff pushed his hat back on his head. "You know, Betty, this is a small community and things have a way of getting around. You're supposed to be with Rose Marie Mallard working on that Red Cross business. And if I was you, I'd get out there just as fast as I could. I'll take this young man with me. What's his name?"

"Frank Garwin," the man said.

"Oh, yes, pleased to meet you, Frank. You don't live here, do you?"

"No."

"Come down once in a while to visit the Calhouns, don't you?"

"That's right."

"Friend of Lorraine?"

"Yes."

"Know a girl named Irma Jessup?"

"Yes."

"Who is she?"

"A friend of Lorraine's."

"And of yours?"

"Yes, I've known her for a long time."

"You know her, Betty?"

"I've never met her. But I've heard Frank speak of her."

"She's been trying to get you long-distance telephone. Seems like there's been an accident out at Calhoun's. A horse kicked a young woman."

"Good heavens!" Betty Turlock said.

Garwin said nothing, but the Sheriff noticed he moved his head over toward the open window on Betty's side of the car, and as he did so, his hand rested for a moment on Betty's.

"Was she hurt badly?" Betty asked.

"Killed," the Sheriff said. "We're sort of looking around. Your dad's been looking for you and you'd better get out to Mallard's right away. You can come with me, Frank."

Garwin came around to the Sheriff's car and climbed in beside him.

"Get going," the Sheriff said to Betty Turlock.

She sent the Turlock car lurching forward in a way that would have been a shock to Lew Turlock if he could have seen the tire-spinning take-off.

Turning to Frank Garwin, the Sheriff said, "Just sit in here a minute, son. I want to ask you a couple of questions."

"Yes, sir."

"You been out there with Betty long?"

"Not very long."

"Live in the city?"

"Yes."

"You don't have a car?"

"No."

"How'd you come to town?"

"On the seven o'clock bus."

"And had a date with Betty?"

"That's right."

"She picked you up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Out at the high school."

"How'd you get from the bus station to the high school?"

"I walked."

"Betty's been gone from her house some little time."

Garwin said, "I—I was late."

"What made you late, Frank?"

He merely shook his head.

The Sheriff's voice was kindly. "When this accident happened out at Calhoun's, I naturally looked around a bit. In the manger I found what seems to be Lorraine Calhoun's diary. Because it's evidence, I've been reading it here and there, sort of hitting the high spots. I guess you're the Frank she mentions in there, aren't you?"

"I suppose so. What did she say about me?"

"I'm asking the questions right now," the Sheriff said, his voice kindly but authoritative. "Now Lorraine seemed to think you belonged to her and that Betty had been doing a little cutting in."

Garwin hesitated.

"Better start talkin'," the Sheriff said.

The authority in the Sheriff's voice brought forth a sudden rush of words.

"I suppose I'm a first-class heel. My folks were cleaned out in the depression. Both of them died within three years of the failure of the bank in which they had their life savings. I'd been a basketball player in prep school and I overdid things. I have an athlete's heart. They say I can probably get over it if I take care of myself. But I can't do any heavy work for a while. I wanted to go to college. I had always wanted to fit myself for a career, and the way things were, it just seemed impossible.

"Lorraine and I were—well, I guess we were in love. I thought I was, anyway. She offered to finance me through college out of her allowance. I took her up on it. And then afterwards—well, I met Betty and. . . gosh, I felt like a heel. I couldn't turn around and give Lorraine a double-cross and—well, I tried to let her see that perhaps we'd changed. But she just couldn't see things that way."

"So you started seein' Betty on the sly?" the Sheriff asked.

"Certainly not," Garwin flared up. "I told Betty that—well, as soon as I realized



how things were drifting, I told her I couldn't see her any more."

"And so you took the bus and came down here for her to meet you?"

"That was her idea. She said that she just couldn't give me up without seeing me once more and talking things over. She—well, it's hard for her to understand."

"Yes, I can see how she might feel," the Sheriff said. "Now, you haven't told me what made you late."

"I was to meet her at the high school. It was the last time I was ever to see her alone. I felt that if Lorraine wanted me to go ahead with it—and announce our engagement—well, that was the way it had to be. And I wasn't even going to come down any more on week-ends. I couldn't bear to be visiting next door to Betty and see her just as a casual acquaintance. It meant too much to me.

"Well, I got off the bus and went to the high school grounds. Betty drove up shortly afterwards. And then I just couldn't face it. I felt certain that if I saw Betty and held her in my arms once more, I couldn't ever give her up. On the other hand, I couldn't go to Lorraine and tell her that we were finished—not after the

things she'd done for me. You don't understand how these things look to Lorraine. She thinks that Betty deliberately cut in and that I'd been heel enough to. . . Oh, I just can't tell you the whole mess, Sheriff. It's all mixed up and—"

"I know, son," the Sheriff said sympathetically. "So you waited there in the high school grounds and decided you were going to wait right there out of sight until Betty drove away?"

"That's right."

"And then what happened?"

"Then I—well, I heard her crying when she thought I wasn't going to meet her and. . . gosh, I just seemed to have got everything all balled up. I have a knack for doing everything wrong. I couldn't let her think I'd stood her up on that last meeting."

"As you get older," the Sheriff said, "you'll find the best way to play things is straight from the shoulder. Now let's get this all straight. How long were you there?"

"I can't tell you exactly how long it was before I spoke to her. I got in on the seven o'clock bus. I was at the high school by seven fifteen. Betty drove up about ten minutes later. I stood there in the shadows, watching her. She shut off her lights and the motor and waited. After ten or



fifteen minutes, she got the idea I wasn't going to show up. I was standing so close to her I could hear her sobbing. After a while I couldn't stand it so I joined her."

The Sheriff switched on the ignition and started his car. "We've got Betty's reputation to consider," he said. "I'll drive you over to San Rodolpho, son, and you can pick up a bus there that will take you back to the city without anyone knowing you were here. We'll all pretend she was with Rose Marie all the time. If you've fallen out of love with Lorraine, you won't be doing her any favor to marry her while you're loving someone else. However, you work out your own problem. "You'll like it better that way."

When the Sheriff returned to his office in the courthouse, he found George Quinlan talking to an exceedingly difficult young woman who quite evidently had backed the Deputy Sheriff into a corner.

Quinlan's face lit up with relief. "Here's the Sheriff now." She turned to Bill Eldon—a chestnut-haired girl who had the sculptured appearance which comes only to women who have both the time and the egotism to cultivate it.

The Sheriff noticed a strong superficial resemblance to the

dead girl. Nor did he need Quinlan's introduction to realize the identity of his caller.

"Miss Lorraine Calhoun," Quinlan said, and his manner indicated that he was retiring from the field of battle just as definitely as though he had added, "And you can count me out from here on."

The young woman was nervously lighting one cigarette from the stub of another.

"Will you *kindly* explain to me what this is all about?" Lorraine asked the Sheriff.

"Well, now, ma'am," the Sheriff said, "you might just as well sit down. We've got some talking to do. The way it looks to me, *you're* going to be the one that explains to *me* what it's all about."

There was no antagonism in the Sheriff's voice, merely a quiet, calm persistence. Lorraine was shrewd enough to note the dogged power back of that good-natured drawl. Abruptly she changed her tactics.

Her smile was meant as a dazzling reward for a man who would come to heel without too much difficulty.

"My diary is private. I want it back."

"So I gather," the Sheriff said. "When did you have it last, Miss Calhoun?"

"That's not your business."

The Sheriff said, "If someone stole that diary, it's my duty to recover it. If you left it in the manger there in the barn, then naturally the Coroner will want to know whether the dead girl was there when you left it and what time it was."

She thought that over while she regarded him with thoughtful eyes. Once more she changed her tactics. "I'm glad you've explained it to me. I can see now that you're absolutely right."

"That's fine. Now when was the last time you had this particular diary?" the Sheriff asked.

"Around six o'clock, shortly before I left the city."

"And what did you do?"

She said, "I made an entry in the diary. Then I put it in the glove compartment of my automobile."

"And locked it up?"

"I don't know. The glove compartment was unlocked when I returned to my car."

"I notice there's one page torn out of your diary—the date of April 17th."

Her eyes and voice showed surprise. "A page missing!"

"Yes, torn out."

"I can't believe it!"

"Where were you on April 17th?"

"Let's see. I was—yes, I was in Kansas City visiting a friend,

stopping over on my way to New York."

"Now you drove down from the city, drove directly to your house, and parked your car in front of the stables?"

"Yes."

"And the stable was dark?"

"That's right."

"The horses had been fed?"

"I don't know."

"But Sid Rowan wasn't there?"

"No. There was no one home. I was upset and I—I took a long walk."

"Where to?"

"Heavens, I don't know. I just walked for miles along the country road."

"Your diary indicates that you might be a little jealous of Betty Turlock."

She threw back her head and laughed throatily. "Jealous of little Betty Turlock? Don't be silly!"

"But your diary mentions a man who is evidently a friend of yours and then mentions Betty—"

"If you *have* to inquire into my private affairs," she said, "Frank is a very close and very dear friend of mine. Betty Turlock was out to get him the minute she met him. I know farmers' daughters are supposed to be fascinating, but I didn't want to see Frank throwing himself away on that sort of

girl. I wouldn't marry Frank if he were the last man on earth, but he's a friend. There's also a matter of some thirty-five hundred dollars that I have invested in Frank Garwin's career. I put up that money for him to get an education. I paid it out of my allowance. Naturally, I want to see him succeed. He can't do it with a girl like Betty Turlock draped around his neck."

The confused pound of hurried steps sounded on the stairs from the lower floor of the courthouse.

The Sheriff turned toward the door.

Rush Medford, the District Attorney, pushed open the door. Behind him, Calhoun, Parnell, and another man who was a stranger to the Sheriff grouped themselves into a supporting semicircle.

"Sheriff," Medford said, "what's this I hear about you holding a diary of Miss Calhoun's?"

"That's right," the Sheriff said.

"Give it back to her," Medford commanded.

"It may be evidence," the Sheriff said.

"Evidence of what?"

"Well, that's what I'm investigating."

Medford raised his voice angrily. "As District Attorney,

it's my duty to advise you as to the course of conduct you should follow. I now advise you to give that diary back."

One of the men behind the District Attorney moved impressively forward. He was, the Sheriff noticed, a well-fed, prosperous man in the forties. The knifelike crease of his trousers, the expensive and unwrinkled appearance of his coat shed an aura of affluence which harmonized with the measured, judicial tones of the man's voice.

"Permit me, Sheriff," he said. "I am Oscar Delano, of the firm of Delano, Swift, Madison and Charles. We handle Mr. Calhoun's legal work. I don't want to seem abrupt, but unless we get that diary back, I am instructed by my client to start suit against you at once for the damages caused to my client by your negligence in falsely announcing to him that his daughter had been killed."

The Sheriff walked across the office, slammed the door of his safe shut, and spun the dial of the combination.

"Start suit," he said.

"You fool!" Medford exclaimed.

The Sheriff settled back in his creaky swivel chair.

"You haven't got a leg to stand on," the city lawyer said.

"Well, now," the Sheriff

drawled, "maybe I haven't. But when you can explain how a mare, wearing a number-ought shoe which measures four and three-sixteenths inches at the widest part can kick a person in the head and leave a mark four and fifteen-sixteenths inches wide, which means a number-two shoe—well, then I'll give you the diary."

"What do you mean?" Calhoun asked.

The Sheriff said, "However that girl was killed, that mare didn't do it. I say it was murder. Now then, go start your lawsuit."

Next morning, the Rockville Gazette was on the streets with an extra.

"MURDER," SCREAMS THE SHERIFF

"PUBLICITY," SNAPS D. A.

"POPPY COCK," SNORTS CALHOUN

The article which followed showed Edward Lyons, the publisher and managing editor, at his sarcastic best.

"When the body of an unidentified young woman was found in the stable of Carl Carver Calhoun, wealthy broker who has established a country home at Rockville, Sheriff Bill Eldon, with a nose for publicity at least as sharp as his nose for clues, promptly announced that the victim was Lorraine Cal-

houn, daughter of the broker. The woman had evidently been kicked by a mare.

"Only after Calhoun and a business associate had driven at breakneck speed to Rockville, and announced that the victim was not only no relation to Mr. Calhoun but a perfect stranger, did the Sheriff reluctantly shift his position. Then, with the aid of a tape measure and some of his 'brilliant' deductive reasoning, he arrived at the conclusion that he was dealing with a murder.

"Because of a three-quarter-inch discrepancy between the size of the shoe on the mare and the imprint of the shoe on the forehead of the victim, Sheriff Eldon lost no time announcing his theory of foul play.

"Regardless of the motive which prompted this action on his part, the result has been all that any publicity-crazed politician could ask for. When word reached the newsrooms of the city papers that an unidentified girl had been murdered in the stable of the wealthy broker, reporters and photographers descended upon Rockville in a flood.

"Rush Medford, the District Attorney, brands the Sheriff's charge as 'premature to say the least. It is,' Medford asserts, 'the result of synthetic clues

which have been conjured up in the imagination of a man who received some publicity in the metropolitan papers a year or so ago and found the experience pleasant.'

"The District Attorney apparently was referring to the murder committed on the old Higbee place last year, a crime in which luck played into Sheriff Eldon's hands, but which netted him some very flattering publicity.

"Doubtless District Attorney Medford is correct in stating that Sheriff Eldon would like to see a repetition of that publicity, just as a kid would like to see Christmas come once a week.

"So far as the death of the young woman is concerned, Rush Medford seems to have kept his head and delivered about the best summary to date.

" 'We don't know who this young woman is,' Medford said. 'We don't know her motive in prowling around the barn of Carl Calhoun. But we do know she had no business being there. She received a kick from a horse which unfortunately proved fatal. Because Sheriff Eldon noted a discrepancy between the imprint of the shoe on the forehead of the victim and the size of shoe worn by the mare, he has inferred foul

play. While he has not, as yet, claimed the death as a murder in so many words, he has insinuated as much.

" 'He had an opportunity to plant the seeds of sensationalism in ground where he knew they would promptly sprout. The temptation was too strong. I, personally,' Medford went on, 'abhor using public office as a means of securing publicity. Because of the prominence of Carl Carver Calhoun, who has done Rockville the honor of picking it as the place for his country residence, a duty was placed upon every official of the County to proceed cautiously and do everything possible to see that innocent parties were spared the embarrassment of that blatant publicity which always follows in the wake of sensationalism.'

"Carl Carver Calhoun was even more outspoken than the District Attorney. 'So far as the Sheriff is concerned,' he said, 'he is an old man and therefore I suppose I should be charitable. But it is hard to be charitable to a man whose every action seems actuated solely by a desire for personal aggrandizement. I warned him that because of my position and metropolitan connections the news value of anything connected with my name would be greatly magnified. I therefore

asked him particularly to be cautious in his actions and not to jump at conclusions.

"This warning occurred after he had made an erroneous identification of the body in my stable as that of my daughter. Instead of heeding that warning, he went plunging on, confiscating private documents belonging to my daughter, which he doubtless hopes to release to the press at some future date.

"I am pleased to find that your District Attorney, Rush Medford, is a young man of broad mental caliber, the sort of timber from which we should select our Appellate Judges. I only wish the Sheriff had one-half his passion for accuracy, one-tenth of his intrinsic integrity."

"So far, the body has not been identified, but the finding of a Kansas City label on the jacket and the imprint of a Kansas City shoestore in the almost-new shoes worn by the unfortunate victim have given authorities grounds to hope that an identification may soon be made."

The Sheriff read the *Rockville Gazette* on the early morning bus on his way to see Irma Jessup.

He found her just finishing breakfast in her apartment and getting ready to leave for the

Trust Company where she was employed in the Escrow Department.

Irma Jessup listened to the Sheriff, and then elevated delicately arched eyebrows. Her call to Betty Turlock? Just a minor matter. Purely personal. Important enough so far as Betty was concerned but not important to anyone else. Yes, she had called several times. She had told Mr. Turlock that it was quite important. Then she had called another number which Mrs. Turlock had given her.

She laughed when faced with the fact that she had hung up the telephone on being advised that the Sheriff was on the other end of the line.

"Good heavens," she exclaimed. "I wondered what I'd stirred up. I just didn't know what to say, and so I hung up."

"You've read the papers?"

"No, what about them?"

"A young woman was kicked by a horse in Calhoun's barn. Killed her."

Irma Jessup expressed consternation and sympathy.

"Any idea who she might have been?" Eldon asked.

"No, of course not."

"Well, now, I don't want to pry into things," Eldon said, "but I'm afraid I've got to know what it was you were calling up Betty Turlock about."

She was ready enough to talk now. "Betty is a nice wholesome girl. But—well, she isn't exactly Lorraine's type. Frank Garwin had been very much in love with Lorraine. I think Lorraine was in love with him. She put up money to get him through college. He'd had some bad luck. I've known Frank ever since we were children. In fact, Frank's folks and my folks were pretty close and there was some sort of business association between them. It was all part of the same transaction when my folks got wiped out. Mr. Calhoun had been in the same company but he was smart enough to pull out before things went bad. I remember he wanted my dad to pull out and I think he wanted Mr. Garwin to. Anyway, that will give you the background."

The Sheriff merely nodded.

She said, "I know Frank pretty well. Frank was in love with Lorraine and then—well, he was out of love with her. And I think Lorraine was out of love with him. There had been sort of a drifting apart. Lorraine was in Maine, spending the summer, and—I don't know, Frank thought her letters were a little cool. He talked to me about it."

"And he was down at Rockville some of the time visiting the family?"

"That's right."

"And got to seeing Betty down there?"

"Yes."

"All right. Now tell me about the telephone call."

"Frank took the bus and went to Rockville to see Betty. He didn't want anybody to know that he had gone there, but Lorraine found it out."

"How?"

"I don't know."

"How do you know that she knew it?"

"She called me and asked if Frank were here. She said she had to see him at once. I knew from the tone of her voice what was in the wind. I felt certain she was going to drive down to Rockville."

"And you were telephoning to tell Betty that Lorraine was on her way down?"

"That's right."

The Sheriff quite evidently was disappointed. "You don't know anything about some young woman from Kansas City about twenty-two years old, weighing about a hundred and twelve pounds, five feet four and a half inches, neat little figure, dark auburn hair, brown eyes?"

"No."

"Know of any girl that description that might be a friend of Lorraine's?"

"No."



The Sheriff took a photograph from his pocket. "Making allowances for the closed eyes and that wound on the forehead, does she look like anyone you know?"

"Definitely no. I've never seen her in my life—not to remember."

The Sheriff thanked her and marked his early morning trip on the debit side of the ledger.

It was almost noon when the Sheriff climbed the stairs to his office. George Quinlan said, "Gosh, Bill, I've been trying all over to locate you."

"What's the trouble?"

"They've identified the body."

"Who is it?"

"Estelle Nichols of Kansas City. She had a charge account at the store where she bought the shoes and one of the clerks happened to remember her."

"Any connection with Calhoun?" the Sheriff asked, and couldn't keep the anxiety from his voice.

Quinlan shook his head.

"Looks like we're licked."

The Sheriff duly noted and appreciated the loyalty of the inclusive pronoun.

"The District Attorney," Quinlan went on, "has dug up a witness from somewhere, a girl who says this Estelle Nichols was crossing the country to join

her, that she planned on hitchhiking. She'd got a letter from this girl that Medford is giving to the newspapers. It says that she was planning on sleeping in barns as she went through the country.

"She saw the Calhoun place all dark early in the evening. Evidently it was right after Sid Rowan had finished feeding the horses and had started for the movie. And that explains why she would have walked in the door without switching on the lights. She was groping around trying to find the ladder which led up to the hayloft when she ran into this horse."

"Which horse?" the Sheriff asked.

"Well," Quinlan said, "—well, a horse."

"A horse wearing a number-two shoe," the sheriff said. "And if she was kicked by a horse wearing a number-two shoe, she didn't fall down where the body was found. Because right there a mare was stabled that was wearing a number-ought shoe."

Quinlan said, "The forehead was flattened under the impact. Hawley says that would distort the impression made by the shoe."

Bill Eldon thought that over. "Maybe some," he admitted, "but not three-quarters of an inch."



Quinlan's dispirited voice showed how he felt. "Once they show this girl was a stranger to the Calhouns and went into a dark barn to find a place to sleep—well, we're licked, Bill. That's all there is to it."

"That letter," the Sheriff said. "Who's got it?"

"Rush Medford has the letter, but I took a photograph. Here it is. It's a life-sized copy."

The Sheriff took the photographic reproduction of the letter which Quinlan handed him. It read:

Dear Mae:

It won't be very long after you receive this letter that you'll see me. I'm going to make it even if I have to hitchhike my way and sleep in stables.

I feel certain that you'll listen to me, even if you have been hypnotized. There are some things I can tell you that will open your eyes.

And, Mae darling, will you see if you can locate the address of that man I was writing you about? I've lost track of him and I'd like to get in touch with him again.

The letter was signed, "Yours always, Estelle."

"Who's the girl that got this letter?" the Sheriff asked.

"Someone name of Mae Adrian."

"And where is she now?"

"Out at Calhoun's."

"Let's go," the Sheriff said.

Quinlan's manner showed some embarrassment. "Rush Medford's out there," he said, "and this lawyer of Calhoun's. They've got Ed Lyons out there, and I guess they're—well, I thought perhaps you'd like to wait until later."

Eldon grinned. "They're preparing a massacre. Is that right?"

"Well, you can put yourself in Ed Lyons' shoes," Quinlan said miserably.

Eldon placed his hand on his Deputy's shoulder. "George," he said, "I learned a long time ago that the only way to handle anything that has to be faced sooner or later is to wade right out in the middle and see how deep it is. Come on, let's go."

They made good time out to Calhoun's country residence. A half dozen cars were grouped around the stable. The Sheriff found a parking space, nodded to Parnell who was just coming through the gate from the Turlock place, and entered the stable.

He found Oscar Delano, Calhoun's attorney, virtually in charge of proceedings, with Rush Medford, the District Attorney, standing by and giving the benefit of his silent approval. A group of interested

spectators was watching the city lawyer. There were, in addition, reporters and photographers from the city papers.

"Well, you can see the situation," Delano was saying to Ed Lyons, publisher of the *Gazette*. "This woman was a hitchhiker who, according to her own statement, was sleeping in stables. Someone took that button and sewed a vest on it. However, it's not for me, a rank outsider, to make any criticisms as to the efficiency of one of your County officials."

"Well," Medford said, "I'm the one to criticize. I . . . here he is now."

The Sheriff stepped forward. "Okay, Medford, I'm here."

Delano cleared his throat significantly, then became silent.

Ed Lyons said, "Well, Bill, you got right in the spotlight to fall flat on your face," and he laughed sarcastically.

Rush Medford said, "We have now identified this young woman. She was a hitchhiker who made a practice of sleeping in stables."

"Mae Adrian here?" the Sheriff asked calmly.

A trim young woman with dark hair and large dark eyes stepped forward and said in a thin, somewhat frightened voice, "I'm Mae Adrian."

"You knew this dead girl?"

She nodded.

"You've seen the body?"

"Yes," she said in almost a whisper.

"Positively identified it," Ed Lyons announced triumphantly.

"And this letter that you received from her, when did you get that?"

"A week ago."

"And what caused you to come forward?"

"I saw her pictures in the papers. I felt certain it was my friend, Estelle Nichols. So I got in touch with the District Attorney and he showed me the body. I identified it."

"And you don't know any of these people?" the Sheriff asked.

"No one."

"What's this in the letter about you being hypnotized?"

She laughed. "Estelle had had an unfortunate love affair and she thought perhaps I was planning to do something she didn't approve of."

Oscar Delano said impatiently, "Well, there you are. The picture is complete. A young woman hitchhiking across the country picks my client's stable as a place to sleep and gets kicked by a horse. Some hick Sheriff sees a chance for notoriety and starts throwing his weight around."

The photographer for one of

the metropolitan newspapers dropped to one knee, focused his camera, and set off a flash, catching Delano standing there in the stable, his attitude that of righteous indignation.

"And which horse do you figure kicked her?" the Sheriff drawled.

Delano whirled to face him. "Sheriff," he said, "I'm going to let you in on a big secret. The horse that kicked her," and here Delano lowered his voice impressively as though about to impart a very confidential secret, "was a quadruped that wore iron shoes. I can't tell you the color of his eyes. I leave that to you."

The roar of laughter that followed furnished inspiration for the news photographer to expose another film, one that showed the old Sheriff standing in the middle of the semicircle of hilarious spectators.

Lew Turlock and his daughter Betty walked across the strip of lawn from the Calhoun's barn, through the gate, and over toward Turlock's garage.

"I think it's a shame," Betty said. "All those people laughing at the Sheriff that way."

"Well, I guess he had his neck stuck out pretty far," Turlock said, and added, "It's a darn good thing for you."

"Why?"

"Well, if it *had* been a murder and the thing had got to the point where they started a detailed investigation, and people found you were supposed to have been with Rose Marie—"

"I know, Dad. Let's skip it, please."

Turlock stopped abruptly. "That left rear tire's down," he said, indicating the family car. "Got to put some air in it."

He walked over to the car, took the ignition key from the lock, inserted it into the trunk, and raised the lid. "You get out the pump, Betty," he said, "and I'll—"

He broke off, staring at what he saw lying on the floor of the trunk—a bar with a prong in the form of a huge "Y". To this prong had been welded a horseshoe.

Betty said, "What in the world—"

Her father bent forward to examine the iron bar. The sinister stain on the horseshoe, with some hairs stuck to the reddish brown patches, bore mute evidence of the murderous purpose for which the weapon had been used.

"How in the world did *that* get there?" Betty asked, and reached toward it.

Her father grabbed her wrist. "Don't touch it! Leave a fingerprint on that and—"

He didn't need to finish the sentence. Betty's hand jerked away from the weapon.

Lew Turlock banged down the lid of the trunk and locked it.

"Betty, how *did* that get in there?"

"Dad, I don't know. I never saw it before."

"This man you were out with," Lew said. "What about him?"

"Frank?"

"Yes."

"What in the world are you suggesting?"

"Nothing, I'm asking questions."

"Why, Frank wouldn't hurt a fly!"

"Can you get him on the phone?" Lew Turlock asked, his face grim as granite.

"Why—yes, I suppose so."

"Come on in," her father said.

He stood at her side as she placed the long-distance call. When she had Frank Garwin on the line Lew Turlock stepped to the telephone. "This is Betty's dad. I have a couple of pretty important questions to ask. Did you ever know an Estelle Nichols of Kansas City?"

There was a moment of hesitation. Then Garwin said, "Yes. I met her a year or so ago. She was working in a bank. Why?"

Turlock said, "That was the girl that was killed over in Calhoun's barn."

"Estelle Nichols killed in Calhoun's barn?" Garwin repeated incredulously.

"That's right. Didn't you see her pictures in the morning paper?"

"Yes. But I never thought it could have been—wait a minute. Hold the phone until I get the paper and take another good look."

Turlock held the phone. A few moments later Garwin's voice came over the wire, a voice that was now filled with apprehension. "That *could* be Estelle," he said.

"Come out here," Turlock ordered, "and keep quiet until you get here. Make it just as quick as you can. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Turlock hung up the telephone, then turned to his daughter. "They've got that killing tagged as an accident now. If we can keep quiet, the thing will just naturally be hushed up."

"Father!"

She had never seen quite that expression in her father's face before.

"Blood is thicker than water," he said and turned away so that his daughter couldn't see his eyes. . . .

Sheriff Eldon pushed his way through the gate between the Calhoun and Turlock properties and said to Lew Turlock, "Hope you don't mind if we look around a minute, Lew?"

Turlock, plainly nervous, said too effusively, "Certainly not. Sure. Go ahead. Help yourself. Anything I can do?"

The Sheriff said, "I don't know, Lew. Things just don't seem to check out in this case. Now, take that dead girl. Here's a girl hitchhiking across country. She comes into Calhoun's stable wearing a light dress, a skimpy little coat, and shoes with thin soles. And as for luggage—why, she didn't have so much as a toothbrush with her! What I want to know is, if that girl went in the stable and got kicked, what happened to all her stuff?"

"Yes," Turlock said nervously, "I see your point."

"Another thing," the Sheriff said. "According to Lorraine's story, she came tearing down here in her automobile and then proceeded to go out and walk for miles and miles along the country roads. Now that don't sound right."

"Don't seem so," Turlock admitted.

"You gettin' a soft tire on that car?" the Sheriff said. "Better pump her up before she

goes completely flat."

Turlock moved away from the automobile. "I'll get at it. What you want to look around for, Bill?"

"I noticed that Calhoun girl smokes pretty much when she's nervous and I thought maybe she parked her car and kept an eye on your house. Lorraine was jealous of Betty. Of course, she won't admit it."

"Betty didn't even lift a finger—" Turlock said.

"I know, Lew, but if Lorraine was jealous and had picked a place where she could watch your house and at the same time keep an eye on her car, seein' her car was parked right in front of the stable, it stands to reason she must have seen this Estelle Nichols go into the stable."

"It was dark," Turlock pointed out.

"I know, but somebody must have opened the door of Lorraine's car and got into her glove compartment and got out the diary. I don't think you'd do that in the dark unless you knew what you were looking for and this Estelle Nichols apparently didn't know Lorraine Calhoun."

"Bill," Turlock blurted, "don't you think you'd be better off if you quit right now and let this thing just simmer down and run its course?"

"I'm licked now," Eldon said. "When that photographer got a picture of all those folks laughing at me over there, it put me in a spot. I can't get no worse off than I am right now. Come along election time, you can imagine what'll happen. Ed Lyons'll have that picture running in his paper and put under it something like, '*How about getting a Sheriff that folks don't laugh at.*' Say, that tire's got a leaky valve. You can hear the air hissing out of it if you listen right sharp. Reverse the valve cap and tighten up the valve. What say we save what little air is left in there?"

Turlock started to interpose himself between the Sheriff and the tire, then restrained himself. The Sheriff unscrewed the cap from the valve, reversed the end, and twisted with his thumb and forefinger.

"Shucks," he said, "that valve stem is loose in there. Now she's tight. Haven't got a pump in the trunk there, have you, Lew?"

"It's all right. I'll fix it," Turlock said. "Don't worry about my car, Bill. You've got lots of things on your mind. Go ahead and look around. Out there back of the pepper tree there's a swing. She might have sat in that."

"From there she could only see the back of the house," the

Sheriff said. "Now over here by this hedge would be a good place where a person could. . . I think I'll look along there."

"Come on," Turlock said anxiously, leading the Sheriff away from the car. "Let's look."

They moved along the hedge. "Look here," the Sheriff said excitedly. "There's a newspaper spread out. Someone could have been sitting down there and spread the paper out to keep the grass from staining a dress and—sure enough! There's a dozen cigarette stubs. Now just a minute, Lew. I'd just as soon you didn't get around here. Let's kind of look for tracks—that's right. A person sitting right there and with her back to the hedge could see the front door of your house."

The Sheriff's voice trailed away into disappointed silence.

"And that's all she could see," Turlock said. "She couldn't see anything that happened over at Calhoun's place. Couldn't see the house, couldn't see the entrance to the stable, couldn't even see where the car was parked."

The Sheriff pursed his lips, then squatted to a sitting position, cowboy fashion.

"Well," he said in a voice that was suddenly tired, "that's the way things go in life, Lew.

You get something worked out and think you're doing all right and then something smacks you down. Of course, Lorraine is lying about getting out and walking up and down country roads. She sat down here where she could watch your house, just the way I figured she did. But I guess it ain't exactly a crime to watch your rival's door to see if your boy friend is taking her out. Anyway, that city lawyer over there would sure claim it wasn't."

The Sheriff started back along the hedge toward the fence and the gate.

Betty Turlock, opening the rear door of the house, stepped out to the porch and saw the Sheriff and her father approaching. Abruptly and self-consciously she jerked back into the house and pulled the door shut.

Lew Turlock said hastily, "Betty's all upset. Just don't want to talk to anybody."

"Uh huh, I know how she feels," Eldon said.

They were approaching the gate when they heard voices.

A group moved through the gate to confront the Sheriff and Lew Turlock.

Parnell included in a gesture Carl Calhoun, Lorraine, Mae Adrian, and Oscar Delano.

"Look here, Eldon. I'm a businessman," Parnell said.

"Now there's no sense having a lot of friction here. Mr. Calhoun's my friend and associate. He's bought this place here in the country and he's got to live here. I want him to enjoy it."

"Ain't no reason why he shouldn't," the Sheriff said.

"Yes, there is. This is a relatively small community. Mr. Calhoun has instructed his attorney to file suit against you on that mistaken identification business. And now that this other thing has been all cleared up, I think the whole thing should be dropped."

The Sheriff said, "That's up to Mr. Calhoun."

"We'll just wipe the whole slate clean," Parnell said. "We won't file suit. You'll quit trying to—"

"Trying to what?" the Sheriff asked.

Parnell was uncomfortably silent.

It was Calhoun who answered the question. "Trying to make capital out of an accidental death which unfortunately took place in my stables."

The Sheriff turned to Lorraine. "I want to ask Miss Calhoun here if she's absolutely certain after she parked her car she just went out and walked along the country roads the way she told me."

Lorraine took a deep drag at the cigarette she was smoking, then said, "Father, isn't there any way you can put a muzzle on this—"

"Because," the Sheriff went on, "right over here on the edge of this hedge you can see where she spread out a newspaper to sit on. You can see the tracks of her high-heeled shoes in the soft soil along the edge of the hedge and you can see a dozen or so cigarette stubs of the particular brand she smokes. And if you want any proof on the time and date, why, the edition of the newspaper gives it to you. It's a late edition of the afternoon paper that comes out to bring results of horse races, and she must have picked it up just before she left the city yesterday."

Lorraine said calmly, "That's absurd."

"Well, now, ma'am, maybe it's absurd and maybe it isn't. There's some pretty good footprints there and I notice you wear a distinctive type of shoe."

"Great heavens," she said indignantly, "do I have to account for every step I take? How do I know whether I left a print there or not? I live here and I walk around. If you have any prints made by my shoes, they may be a week old."

"Nope, they aren't a week

old," the Sheriff said. "They were made sometime yesterday—sometime after the rain had softened up the ground. And that newspaper shows they were made sometime after five o'clock at night. Now, if you'll be frank and tell me—"

"Come, come," Delano said in his smooth, suave voice. "Mr. Parnell was extending an olive branch, Sheriff. Now, if we're going to wipe the slate clean, we'll wipe it clean. After all, my client isn't particularly interested in sticking you for damages, but he has a perfect case. Now, if he's willing to drop it, we'll expect you to meet us halfway."

"Facts are facts," the Sheriff said. "I just want to get them sort of straightened out. And there's one other question I want to ask Miss Adrian here. This dead girl said something in her letter about trying to get an address of some man that she'd met. Who is that man?"

Mae Adrian said, "A young law student. She'd met him when he was on vacation a year ago."

"What's the fellow's name?" the Sheriff asked Mae Adrian.

"Good Lord," Calhoun groaned. "Don't you ever have enough? Must you always lead with your chin?"

"What's his name?" the Sheriff repeated.



Mae Adrian said, "No one whom you ever heard of before, Sheriff. He's a law student whose folks lived in Kansas City for a while and were in business there. A young man by the name of Frank Garwin."

"Frank Garwin!" Lorraine exclaimed. "Why, I know *him*! He's a very close friend."

"A friend of the family," Carl Calhoun hastened to add.

"I've known him for some years myself," Parnell said. "What about him?"

Mae Adrian was as nonplused at the bombshell she had dropped as a sportsman whose "unloaded" gun roars into an accidental discharge.

"Why I was going to try and find his address for Estelle. I didn't know. . . Of course, Estelle had just met him there the one time but I guess she had a crush on him. He's a young lawyer, I believe, and Estelle had some legal problem."

Oscar Delano said authoritatively, "Now look here, Sheriff, I'll grant you there's an element of coincidence here, but I don't want you trying to torture anything else into it."

Parnell turned to Lew Turlock. "Well, I still don't see that it changes the situation any. By the way, Mr. Turlock, I'm in need of a car. Perhaps you'd like to drive us to the city. I'll pay you well. I promised Miss

Adrian I'd take her back with me. There'll just be the two of us."

"Maybe Miss Adrian ain't quite ready to go home yet," the Sheriff said, "the way things are shaping up now."

"Well, she'll be ready in a minute," Parnell said irritably. "How about it, Turlock?"

Turlock seemed undecided for a moment, then abruptly caught Bill Eldon's eye and motioned to him. "Bill," he said, "could I talk with you a minute private like?"

"How about taking us to the city?" Parnell asked impatiently.

Turlock said, "I'll tell you when I get back."

The Sheriff moved over a few yards from the little group. "What is it, Lew?"

Turlock said, "Bill, that wasn't any accident—the woman that got kicked in the barn."

"I didn't think it was," the Sheriff said.

"She was hit with a horseshoe put on a club."

The Sheriff let his eyes bore steadily into those of Turlock. "All right, Lew," he said quietly. "Let's have it."

Turlock said, "A few minutes ago I opened up the trunk on my automobile and—well, Bill, there's a club in there."

"What sort of a club?"

"An iron bar with a prong welded to it and a horseshoe welded to that prong. The thing's about two feet long. And—well, Bill, I guess it's the one that was used in the murder."

"Did you touch it?" the Sheriff asked. "That weapon?"

"No."

"Did Betty?"

"No."

The Sheriff said, "Don't say anything to anyone. Tell Parnell he can't use your car because after talking with me you found there's something you have to do uptown. Drive to the back of the courthouse and wait for Quinlan. Don't open up that trunk for anyone until Quinlan can take fingerprints. What does it look like—about a number-two horseshoe?"

"It's about a number-two," Turlock said, "and it has some caked blood on it. It's what killed her, all right."

The Sheriff and Lew Turlock rejoined the little group. Turlock said, "I'm sorry, Parnell, I've got to go to town. I guess you'll have to get some other car."

Parnell said, "The District Attorney's going into the city and he's taking Miss Adrian in with him. I'll go with him."

Rush Medford was perfectly willing to amplify that statement. "I'm going in to

interview Frank Garwin," he said. "I have just talked with him over the long-distance telephone, using Lew Turlock's phone and a number given me by Miss Calhoun."

Medford's manner indicated that he had an important announcement to make and he waited until he had the attention of every person there before making it.

"Mr. Garwin has admitted to me over the telephone," he said, "that not only was he here yesterday night, but that a *friend* drove him over to San Rodolpho and put him on a bus at that point so he could get back to the city without anyone knowing he was here. The name of that *friend* was Bill Eldon, Sheriff of the County. Under the circumstances, I think an investigation is in order." He waited another dramatic moment, then turned to the newspaper reporter, "And you may quote me on that."

At the Sheriff's office in the courthouse George Quinlan finished dusting the grim murder weapon with a white metallic powder especially prepared to bring out latent fingerprints.

"Find anything?" Eldon asked.

"Not a thing," Quinlan said.

"It's been wiped and polished with something that's removed every single print that was on it. It might have been a piece of soft leather."

Bill Eldon fished a cloth tobacco sack from his pocket, held a grooved paper in his left hand, and rolled a cigarette with a few deft motions.

"Well," he said, "when you run up against something like that, you just have to read trail, that's all."

"Only we haven't any trail," Quinlan said.

"Oh, yes, we have. We've got lots of trail."

"Such as what?"

"Well, to begin with, we've got the time element."

"Yes, that's right," Quinlan said. "Immediately after Sid Rowan left for the movies."

Eldon shook his head.

"But it has to be that time, Bill. Rowan had just fed the horses before he left. He put down hay for this mare. The body lying there disturbed her so she couldn't eat. The chute coming down from the loft was chock-full of hay."

"What kind of hay?" Eldon asked.

"What kind of hay?" Quinlan repeated. "Why, uh, hay."

"Barley hay," the Sheriff said. "Calhoun's feeding his horses oat hay. He got some barley hay for the cattle, feeds

them some alfalfa hay and some barley. The oat hay is for the horses. It's been pretty hard to get."

Quinlan thought that over.

"What's more," the Sheriff went on, "the minute you run across a weapon like this, you know you're figuring on plain, cold-blooded, deliberate murder—murder that was thought out quite some time in advance. The idea was the murder would look like an accident. It'd just be some unfortunate girl that blundered into a stable and got kicked by a horse. Then at the last minute something happened that made the murderer change his plans."

Quinlan said, "For my money Garwin is the guilty party. He was getting along all right with Betty Turlock and then this girl that he'd known in Kansas City was coming out. He'd probably left her under circumstances that he didn't want disclosed to the girl he was going to ask to marry him."

The Sheriff scraped a match into flame and applied it to the end of his hand-rolled cigarette. "Well, now, George," he drawled, "let's look at it from all angles."

"I am."

"No, you're not. If Garwin killed her, he must have known she was going to come to that stable," the Sheriff stated.

"Known she was going to come there!" Quinlan exclaimed. "He took her there. He deliberately manipulated things so she went to the stable. That's why he was late keeping his date with Betty down at the high school grounds."

"Could be, of course," the Sheriff said.

"And if it is," Quinlan said, "we're worse off than we were before."

"How come?"

"You took Garwin over to San Rodolpho so he could get a bus and all that."

"I suppose so," the Sheriff admitted, "but somehow I don't size Frank Garwin up for that sort of a boy. He's a pretty nice young chap, sort of shy and sensitive. He wouldn't want to hurt a woman's feelings and would do almost anything to feel he was being a gentleman."

"That type fools you," Quinlan pointed out. "They get in a position from which there seems to be no escape. So then they try to get the obstacles out of the way. You take a two-fisted hard-boiled chap and he'd go to his girl friend and say, 'Look, sister, you were a swell babe when I was in Kansas City but there's been a lot of water under the bridge since then and now I have met somebody I like a lot better.'"

The Sheriff nodded thought-

fully, his head wrapped in a cloud of cigarette smoke. "You got something there," he admitted after a moment, and then added after a few thoughtful seconds, "I'd like to play this so we could keep Betty out of it as much as possible. Lots of folks would think that Betty was sort of two-timing her folks, saying she was going out to spend the night with Rose Marie Mallard and then meeting this man Garwin."

"You can't help that," Quinlan said. "Every once in a while someone does something like that just when a murder turns on the spotlight."

"I know," the Sheriff interrupted, "but you take a nice kid like Betty Turlock. Sort of seems as though we could protect her a little."

"We've got our hands full protecting ourselves," Quinlan said. "By the time Ed Lyons gets done with a writeup about how there was only one person who knew Estelle Nichols and that person was mysteriously spirited out of town by none other than the Sheriff—"

Bill Eldon nodded. "Oh, sure," he said philosophically, "Ed Lyons is a dirty fighter. You can't expect anything else."

The Sheriff smoked in silence for a few minutes. Then,

as he came to the end of his cigarette, he pinched out the stub with all the care of a man who has spent much time in the frost. Abruptly he said, "You know, we've got one other clue we're sort of overlooking."

"What's that?"

"Suppose you wanted to kill someone," the Sheriff said, "and get away with it? Would it ever occur to you to take them into a stable at night and hit them over the head with a horseshoe club so it'd look as though a horse had kicked them?"

"No," Quinlan said.

"Wouldn't to me either," the Sheriff said.

"But if you were going to kill someone with a horseshoe, you'd naturally want to do it in a stable," Quinlan pointed out.

"You said it, only you put it backwards."

"What do you mean?"

The Sheriff grinned, "If you were going to kill somebody in a stable, you'd maybe get the idea of killing them with a horseshoe. I think *now* we're beginning to get some place."

The Grand Jury, hastily called in special session by the District Attorney, sat grim-faced. These men were farmers and small businessmen with uncompromising standards of individual integrity. They

would be just but stern, and the rumor that the Sheriff had got himself involved by smuggling a witness out of the County was due for a thorough investigation.

Out in the anteroom were the witnesses whom Rush Medford had summoned. And waiting with his lips curled in a smile of anticipatory triumph was Ed Lyons, publisher of the *Rockville Gazette*, ready to drive the final nail in Bill Eldon's political coffin.

The District Attorney briefly outlined his position to the members of the Grand Jury. "The object of this investigation," he said, "is to find out just what's going on here. I think you folks are familiar with what's happened. A woman got into the stable of one Carl Carver Calhoun. She was kicked by a horse and died. There are some mysterious circumstances surrounding her death.

"For one thing, the diary of Lorraine Calhoun was found in the manger of the stall in front of which the body was lying. One page had been torn out. It's pretty apparent now that this woman's trip to that stable was not accidental. It was made with some definite purpose and it was probably made with a companion.

"Apparently there is only

one person whom this woman knew and who also knew the Calhouns and the setup of the Calhoun stable. That person is Frank Garwin. I want you gentlemen to hear his story. I want you to hear how he left this County. I want you to hear who picked him up and drove him to San Rodolpho.

"I am not going to make any comments as to the motive back of all this. It's the duty of this body to investigate this whole thing. Now then, gentlemen, I want Frank Garwin called as a witness. And I want his testimony taken down in shorthand."

One or two of the jurors looked over to where Bill Eldon was sitting, tight-lipped. Here and there were glances of sympathy. But the foreman of the Grand Jury voiced the sentiments of all of its members when he said to Medford, "You're the District Attorney. Go ahead with your witnesses. If there's anything wrong with the way any of the offices in this County are being run, we aim to do something about it."

Frank Garwin was brought in and interrogated by the District Attorney. He told the same story he had told the Sheriff, admitting, however, that he knew Estelle Nichols, the dead girl, but denying he had known that she was

anywhere in the state. He had, he said, lost track of her something over a year ago. They had, he admitted, been friendly, but since then he had had what he referred to as "other interests."

Medford passed by the "other interests" in order to get to the point which was of most interest to him.

"Now, Frank," he said, "last night you were here in Rockville?"

"Yes, sir."

"And where did you go after you left the Calhoun barn?"

"I didn't go to the Calhoun barn."

"Well, we'll skip that for the moment. Did you see the Sheriff of this County last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Well, he picked me up down at the ball park."

"And what did he do?"

"He—well, he gave me a lift to where I could catch the bus for the city."

Rush Medford said, "Now think carefully, young man. Let's not have any misunderstanding about this. Did he take you to where you wanted to get the bus, or did he suggest that he should take you to a certain place to get the bus?"

"Well, he suggested it."

"Why?"

"He thought that it might be just as well if my friends didn't see me around here."

"I see," Medford said sarcastically. "Spirited you out of town, and he did that in a County car, I believe, using the County tires and the County gasoline."

Garwin was silent.

"Come, come, young man," the District Attorney said. "Let's at least answer questions. That's a fact, isn't it?"

"I guess it was the County car. It had a red spotlight on it."

"That's all," Medford said.

The foreman of the Grand Jury turned to the Sheriff. "You want to ask this boy any questions to try and clear this thing up, Bill?" he asked.

The Sheriff merely shook his head.

The Grand Jurymen exchanged glances. There was sympathy in those glances, but there was also a certain underlying significance.

The foreman said to Garwin, "That's all, young man. You can go back to the room with the other witnesses. You're not supposed to tell them anything about what questions were asked you and you're not supposed to tell anybody what testimony you gave."

When Garwin had gone, the foreman said, "The way I size

things up, Bill, the boys sort of think this calls for 'an explanation of some sort.'"

Heads nodded gravely about the Grand Jury room.

"Well," the Sheriff said, "the way I look at this case, gentlemen, it was murder. A plain, cold-blooded, deliberate murder."

Medford said, "That's fantastic and absurd on the face of it. But the mere fact that you *think* that it's a murder case makes your conduct in spiriting one of the principals in the case out of the County doubly culpable. Now, as I see it, gentlemen, it's pretty clear that this man, Garwin, must have gone to the barn with this young woman. He must have been there when she got kicked, and he must have tried to keep himself from being involved in the subsequent notoriety by simply sneaking out and getting this Turlock girl to give him an alibi.

"Now I propose to call this Turlock girl and prove that she doesn't know where Garwin was *at the time* this woman was killed, that she had an appointment with him and Garwin stood her up and kept her waiting for something like an hour—simply because he was in Calhoun's barn with this Estelle Nichols. May I now call Betty Turlock?"



The Sheriff said, "I just want to point out that I was makin' an explanation when the District Attorney interrupted me."

The foreman nodded. "You go ahead and explain, Bill."

"When you have a murder case," the Sheriff said, "lots of little things become important. But every little thing isn't important. The way I see it, there's no use taking a nice girl like Betty Turlock and putting her up here in front of this Grand Jury simply to show the man she's in love with was a little bit late in keeping his appointment."

"Oh, certainly," Medford said sarcastically. "The things that you don't want brought out are the unimportant little things. But when you get a half-inch or so discrepancy in the measurement of a horseshoe—"

"Now that will be about all out of you for a minute, Rush Medford," the Sheriff said. "I'm making my explanation to the Grand Jury. You can talk afterwards."

"That's right, Rush," the foreman said. "Let's give Bill a chance to explain."

"Now then," Bill Eldon went on, "when I say that was cold-blooded, deliberate murder, I know what I'm talking about. The mare wears a

number-ought shoe. The wound was made with a number-two shoe. The mare wouldn't hardly have struck up high enough with a kick to have kicked the girl on the forehead if she'd been standing back of the manger. And you'll notice from the wound, the main force was on the *upper* part of the horseshoe. Now, if the mare had kicked up, she'd be puttin' the power on the *bottom* part of the shoe."

Medford sneered, "The trouble with that argument is it proves too much. You're proving that *no* horse could have kicked the girl."

"That right, Medford," the Sheriff said. "You're gradually getting the idea. And if you want to see what killed the girl, here it is."

The Sheriff nodded to Quinlan. Quinlan brought forward the iron club with the horseshoe welded onto it.

The Grand Jurors left their seats and crowded around the lethal weapon.

"Where did you get this?" Medford asked.

"Never mind," the Sheriff said. "I'm making an explanation right now. Now, you gentlemen hadn't better touch this yet because there's some blood and hairs on the horseshoe that we may need for evidence. There aren't any



fingerprints on the thing because we've tested it carefully. Someone rubbed it with a piece of chamois skin or something and got all the fingerprints off. Now, if you boys will just go back and sit down, I'll tell you what happened."

The Grand Jurors resumed their seats. The District Attorney moved over to regard the welded horseshoe in frowning anger.

"To kill a girl with a horseshoe so it would look like an accidental kick by a horse," the Sheriff went on, "you'd want to be sure everyone knew she'd gone into the barn. Now, I've got a theory that when this Estelle Nichols wrote her friend that she'd sleep in barns if she had to, she signed her death warrant right there. I think someone who knew about that letter got Estelle Nichols in the barn, and then, when he had her in the right position, clubbed her over the head.

"You see, he had to make just one blow do the job in order to make it look right. He had this diary with him and he needed both hands to swing this club around with the force he needed. He'd torn one page out of the diary, which was the only reason he was after it in the first place. And not having any more use for the diary, he just tossed it into the manger

when he swung around to strike that blow.

"The murderer intended to go pick up that diary later on, but he'd figured without the mare. The mare was so nervous that the killer was afraid to go into the stall. As far as he was concerned, there wasn't any particular need to get that diary because he'd already torn out the one page that he'd wanted destroyed."

"You say this was a man?" the foreman asked the Sheriff.

"Sure it was a man," the Sheriff said. "For one thing, look at the welding job. You don't go into some blacksmith shop and ask to have a club welded on a horseshoe when you're intending to go out and murder someone with it. You do the job yourself. Since the war there are some women that know a lot about welding, but to me it looks like a man's job.

"And there are two or three other things that make it look like a man that's been around the country a little bit but not quite enough. A man who doesn't realize there's a difference in the size of shoes on horses. A man who doesn't know the difference between barley and oat hay. Remember what Estelle Nichols wrote this Adrian girl in a letter. You've got a photograph of it there. Somethin' about in spite of the

fact she was hypnotized she hoped Mae would listen when Estelle told her the things that you just couldn't put on paper. Figure that out and that means a man."

Heads nodded in unison around the Grand Jury room.

"Now then," the Sheriff said, "if it's a man, it means that Mae Adrian is protecting him, because, according to my theory, the man must have seen that letter from Estelle saying she was going to come out here and sleep in stables if she had to. Right away he made up his mind that he was going to see she was killed in a stable so it would look like an accidental death.

"You can figure it out for yourselves. If this Estelle Nichols really had been sleeping in stables, she wouldn't have slept in one this close to the end of her journey. She could have hitchhiked her way into the city within a couple of hours, joined her friend, and had a bath and a good bed. What's more, no one's ever found anything belonging to this young woman except the clothes she was wearing. Now, if she'd been hitchhiking, she certainly must have had a few things with her.

"Therefore, the way I figure it, she had already been in to see Mae Adrian. And the man

that killed her picked her up and brought her back to the Calhoun barn. Then he probably went back to Mae Adrian and said to her, 'Look, Mae, the most awful thing happened. Estelle and I were in a barn and a horse kicked her. I don't want anybody to know that I was in there with her because it would ruin my business. And seeing it was an accident, you just keep quiet and it will all blow over.'

"Remember that this club shows the murder had been deliberately planned. The man who did it hoped he could make an 'accident' out of it; but in case he couldn't, he had a second string to his bow. He was going to frame it on Frank Garwin. Why? Because he knew for one thing young Garwin was going to be in Rockville that night. For another, he knew about Estelle asking for Frank's address in that letter.

"That gives us another clue. The man not only knew Mae Adrian real well, but he also knew Frank Garwin, and he also must have known Sid Rowan and his wife were planning to go to a movie. And he also knew Garwin would have an alibi for the last part of the evening. So, if he had to make it murder and pin it on somebody, he wanted the time element mixed up so it would seem the mare hadn't been able

to eat her hay because of the body being there.

"So after the killing he put more hay down the feed chute—but he gave himself away by putting in barley hay instead of oat hay. He tried to show the mare wasn't hungry, and in doing that left the best clue of all, because the mare had been hungry and had eaten her hay—the oat hay Sid Rowan had put down for her. But later on the murderer had tried to show the mare wouldn't eat by putting down more hay—and because he couldn't tell the difference between oat hay and barley hay, he proved the fact we were dealing with cold-blooded murder.

"But this murderer was feeling pretty well satisfied with himself. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the death would have been considered just an accident and passed off as such. But if something went wrong, he had only to plant the murder weapon in a car which Frank Garwin had been in the night of the killing—and then be sure the weapon was found at just the right time. That was the most important thing of all.

"To fix that up, he did a simple thing. He unscrewed the valve in one of the rear tires on Turlock's car just enough to make some of the air leak out. Now if you gentlemen are

interested in all this, let's get Mae Adrian in and ask her a couple of questions."

There was a chorus of quick, eager assents.

Rush Medford started to say something; then, at the expressions he saw on the faces about him, changed his mind and remained silent.

Mae Adrian came in and was sworn.

The foreman said to the Sheriff, "Suppose you ask her the questions, Bill."

The Sheriff smiled at the nervous young woman. "Mae," he said in his kindly, drawling voice, "you might as well answer a few questions for us here. We don't like to pry into your private affairs, but we've got to clean this thing up."

She nodded.

"Now then," the Sheriff said, "when you said that you were about to do something Estelle didn't approve of, did that mean you were going to get married?"

"Well, not exactly, I was going with someone, and I was going to let him invest some money I had inherited."

"Pretty handy with tools, isn't he? Makes you little gadgets out of steel and things?"

Her face lit up. "Yes, he does. He makes me hammered-brass trays and he welds tubing

into ornamental candlesticks and—”

“And what’s his name?” the Sheriff asked.

“He doesn’t want me to tell who he is and I’m not going to.”

“Did he know Estelle Nichols?”

“I guess so. . . Yes.”

“She’d known him pretty well, hadn’t she?”

“Well, yes.”

“And you showed this man this letter from Estelle and told him she was coming out, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

The Sheriff said in a kindly voice, “Now come, Miss Adrian, let’s be frank. That man is Henry Parnell, isn’t he?”

She clamped her lips together.

“Come, come,” the Sheriff said. “You might just as well come clean as get in trouble with the Grand Jury for not answering questions. He and Estelle Nichols went to call on Calhoun and a horse kicked Estelle and killed her and then he didn’t want Calhoun to know he’d been with this girl in his barn. So you agreed to help him hush it up since it was an accident anyway, and nothing you could do would bring your friend back to life.”

She started to cry.

“And then after it began to

look as though things were getting pretty hot, Parnell told you it would be better for you to identify the body and give that letter to the authorities, saying that she intended to sleep in barns, so it would look as though she had gone into Calhoun’s barn to sleep. Now that’s right, isn’t it, Mae?”

She nodded, still sobbing.

“That’s a good girl,” the Sheriff said. “Now you just go in that other room and wait a minute and we’ll talk things over later on after you’ve got to feeling better.”

Once she had left the room, the Sheriff turned to the Grand Jury. “Well, gentlemen,” he said, “there we are. I suppose we may as well talk with Parnell. Think we got a pretty good case against him, no matter what he says or doesn’t say.”

“What I don’t get,” the foreman said, “is how you knew it was Parnell?”

“Well,” the Sheriff said, “first rattle out of the box, the murderer had tried to make it look like an accident. When he saw he wasn’t going to be able to get away with that, he tried to blame the murder on Frank Garwin. Parnell was pretty anxious for me to find that murder weapon there in Lew Turlock’s car. The way the air was going out of that tire, the

valve hadn't been unscrewed very long.

"I tried to think back, of who left the gathering there in the barn to go over to Turlock's place, and it was Parnell. When I drove up he was coming in through Turlock's gate. He'd gone over and unscrewed the core in the valve stem. And then, of course, when he wanted to rent the car, I knew he *must* be the one, because his idea was to get the car, then call attention to that flat tire, and get Lew to open the trunk where the murder weapon had been planted.

"There are two or three other things. That page missing from the diary showed that the murderer must have had some contact with Lorraine Calhoun back in April. It must have been something that Lorraine wouldn't remember particularly unless she got to reading her diary. Probably when she was in Kansas City her friends had told her something about a slicker named Parnell. She'd put something about this friend in her diary and then forgotten about it.

"But one of Parnell's Kansas City friends knew it was there and must have written him. Made it awkward for Parnell when he was just about to interest Calhoun in a business deal. The thing probably came

through Frank Garwin 'cause you remember Parnell blurted out he'd known Frank for years, but he hadn't known Calhoun near that long. So Parnell must have known Frank in Kansas City.

"And that's another thing to remember. Whoever did the thing knew Lorraine's car with her diary in the glove compartment was going to be parked there at the stable, knew Garwin was going to be seeing Betty Turlock secretly, knew Sid Rowan was going to a movie, knew his way around the Calhoun barn, but didn't know what sort of hay Calhoun was feeding the horses.

"Shucks, it's a cinch, gentlemen—just a plain straight trail pointing to one man and to one man alone, a man who had double-crossed a girl in Kansas City and was now trying to rig another deal here with a friend of hers and getting ready to fleece a rich man. Put that all together and you *know* who it was."

"Well," the foreman said, "let's get Parnell in here and see if we can get anything out of him. Probably we can't, but we can try."

Parnell came in and took the stand, his manner that of being courteous and helpful.

The Sheriff said, "Mr. Parnell, you sure you never

knew this Estelle Nichols?"

"Absolutely."

"You know Mae Adrian, don't you?"

"Why, I saw her today, yes."

"But you knew her before that?"

"I—ah—may I ask what is the object of this questioning?"

"Just tryin' to get at the facts," the Sheriff said.

"Well, I think I'm entitled to a little something more than that."

"The question," the Sheriff said, "is do you or don't you know Mae Adrian?"

Parnell looked around at the circle of grim, purposeful faces.

"I don't think I care to answer that question."

"Why not?"

"Frankly, I don't think it's any of your business and I don't like the attitude of the men here."

The Sheriff abruptly produced the murder weapon.

"I now show you a number-two horseshoe welded to an iron bar. Ever seen that before?"

"No, I suppose that's some sort of a branding iron, but it's a new one on me. I've never seen it before."

"You will admit, won't you, that you told Mae Adrian you'd gone to the barn with Estelle Nichols and that there'd been an accident? That a horse had

kicked her and that you wanted your name kept out of it?"

Parnell wet his lips. "I refuse to answer that question."

"On what grounds?" the Sheriff asked.

Parnell took a deep breath, then said desperately, "On the grounds that the answer might incriminate me."

"You're darn right it would," the Sheriff said. "We don't even *need* an answer. We've got Mae Adrian's testimony and we're going out and take a look at that little hobby workshop of yours and see if we can't find some left-over materials that'll analyze just about the same as the stuff in this murder weapon. And as far as *you're* concerned, Mr. Parnell, you're going to stay right here in the County jail until we've worked up a murder case against you."

The Sheriff unlocked the front door of his house. It was nearing midnight and he was dog-tired. He'd had a strenuous period of activity and now that the excitement and strain were over, there was a terrific letdown. No use kidding himself, he wasn't as young as he used to be.

Very quietly the Sheriff tiptoed across the hall. His sister-in-law would be demanding all the news if he saw her.

He had almost reached his bedroom when he saw his sister-in-law attired in pajamas and slippers, sitting by a floor lamp in the living room. Across her lap was the evening edition of the *Rockville Gazette* with its big headlines: "CROWD GIVES SHERIFF THE HORSELAUGH."

The Sheriff tiptoed over and stood silently looking down at Doris' face. She had removed both upper and lower plates, which gave her face a peculiarly collapsed expression, but even in sleep and with her teeth out there was a sharp, ferret-like expression in the contour of her features. She had carefully drawn her chair to a place where she could command a view of the entrance to the

garage through the parlor window and where no one could enter by the front door without her seeing him.

Bill Eldon leaned gently over the sleeping figure, picked up the paper and crossed out the word "Sheriff" in the headlines, inserting the word "Publisher"—so that the headlines read:

"CROWD GIVES PUBLISHER THE HORSELAUGH."

Gently the Sheriff tiptoed into his bedroom.

From the pillow his wife's voice arose sleepily, "Did you see Doris out there?"

The Sheriff chuckled. "I saw her," he said. And then, a few seconds later, as he was slipping out of his outer garments, added "first."

"Q"

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# Robert Twohy

## Up Where the Air Is Clean

*This story first appeared in the February 1969 issue of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, on sale January 2, 1969, about two months before the book publication of Mario Puzo's THE GODFATHER. . .*

Ben got in the cab. His Uncle Al shoved his bulk in after him, grunting to the driver, "Brockford Towers."

They started uptown.

Al said, "You nervous?"

Ben frowned. Then he shrugged. "Maybe. A little."

"So, why not? You're on your way to meet a big man. Today your whole future opens up."

Ben glanced at his uncle, taking in the cheap brown suit, the cracked shoes, the pouches in the broad red-veined face. There was a faint smell of whiskey. Uncle Al wasn't drunk this afternoon, hadn't drunk today, but the whiskey smell was there. It must come from his clothes.

Al was nodding. "You'll go a long way. You're your father all over again."

Ben knew it was true. He had the same pale, thin-featured face, the same large dark eyes that showed in the photograph

of his father that hung over the mantel in Al's apartment. His father had been somebody and Ben was going to be somebody. Today was the beginning—he was on his way now to meet Mr. Cost, the Division Leader—the third or fourth most powerful man in The Family.

Mr. Cost had been at last Monday's meeting—one of the silent elders, sitting in the shadows, watching as Ben and the other four initiates came, one by one, to the long table, and spoke the oath with one hand grasping the dagger, and sipped the wine mixed with blood.

None of the elders had shown himself or spoken to the initiates that night, but two days later, word had come: Uncle Al should bring Ben to Mr. Cost's suite at the Brockford Towers.

"It means just one thing," Al had said. "It means that he's singled you out. You're going to start in The Family not as an



ordinary soldier, but as a Special."

In a few years, if things worked out, Ben would be climbing the ladder. In ten, fifteen years—well, who could say? In The Family, if you were chosen as a Special, how far you went depended on what you had inside of you. How far would Ben's drive take him in ten, fifteen years?

The cab had left the grubby downtown area where Ben and his uncle lived, and had entered a section of tall apartments, stone and glass soaring into the sky. Ben glanced up. He had a feeling, as he looked at the buildings with their edges standing out sharp against the clear sky, that the air was different up there. Up there the air was clean.

"Well," said Al, rubbing his hands and smiling, "we're here."

Ben said, as they got out, "Let me take care of the cab."

"No, the cab is on me. This is my big day as much as it is yours."

Ben tried not to be irritated by his uncle's sentimentality. Al had been good to him. Twelve years ago, when his father had got killed, his uncle and aunt had taken him in, and all those years it was like he was their son.

When Aunt Rose had died

last year, Al had started the heavy drinking. He had told Ben, "If it wasn't for you, my hopes for you, I'd go off the bridge. What else do I have to live for?"

Well, Ben was going to climb high, high, and he would look out for his uncle. Al was going to have decent clothes and a good apartment and good whiskey instead of the rotgut he poured into himself. Ben was going to pay back what he owed him. The old boy had some good years coming to him. . .

Mr. Cost's apartment was on the seventeenth floor. It was quiet, and sunlight came in the windows, and there was no music; but Ben had the feeling that the apartment was like quiet music. He had never been in a place like this. The air in the apartment was thin and clean.

The white-jacketed house-boy who had let him in stepped aside. A fat man with a wide shining face sat on a white couch. He wore a beautiful soft blue suit. It was strained tight over his thighs, which were like huge rolls of meat.

"Mr. Cost," Al said, in a tight voice.

The fat man's eyes were on Ben. Ben felt that the hard, shining eyes were drilling into him. He looked back, keeping

his face and hands still, feeling nervous, hoping it didn't show too much, feeling it was a nervousness he could handle.

The man said in a soft voice, "You look like your father. That's why I noticed you at the initiation."

Ben heard the fast, shallow breathing of his uncle. They stood like two schoolboys, waiting for Mr. Cost to dismiss them, or to ask them to sit down.

Mr. Cost had a drink in his hand, and he sipped it, watching Ben. "How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"Your father was a tiger. Did you know that?"

Ben shook his head. "I didn't know him. He died when I was seven."

"He was a tiger... too much tiger, not enough fox. If he'd had more fox in him, he'd be alive today. Instead he's a corpse, shot down by a detective sergeant he never should have tangled with."

The man's thick pink lips twisted. "It isn't enough, just to be a tiger."

The houseboy coughed. Ben glanced round and saw a platter heaped with little sandwiches.

"Go ahead," said Mr. Cost.

Ben took one. His uncle said, in that tight voice, "Thanks. Not just now."

The fat man smiled down at

the platter, and selected four little sandwiches, two in each hand, holding his glass between his thighs.

"Fix the gentlemen drinks, Larry. Then leave the bottles on the sideboard and go."

He sat back, and started to eat the sandwiches, watching Ben with his hard shining eyes. After finishing two sandwiches, he licked a bit of meat paste from one of his thick white fingers, and said, "Sit down."

Ben sat down in a chair near the couch, with his drink. Al started across the room to a small straight chair near the door.

"Sit closer, Al," said Mr. Cost. "Why are you so humble?"

Al's face went red. He mumbled something.

"You're not a tiger at all, are you, Al?"

"No, Mr. Cost."

"Well, so you're not. So you're a simple soldier. You're still in The Family, aren't you?"

"Sure."

"We're all in The Family. I happen to be a leader and you happen to be a simple soldier. So—that's life. You've never gone far but you've done your work and I honor you."

Al stared at him, his face flushed, his eyes shining.

"I honor you for a lifetime

of loyal service. . . I hear you're hitting the bars a bit now, but I know that your wife died. I know it's been a hard year. Sit down here in this chair by your nephew."

Al came and sat down. He looked for a moment at the drink in his hand, then he breathed deeply and took two long swallows. The flush in his face faded but his eyes remained shining as he looked at Mr. Cost.

The fat man turned to Ben. "I personally picked you out. But it's just a hunch, a feeling. Maybe you'll be a leader, maybe you won't. . . What we do, we put those we pick for Specials to a trial. Those who pass, they go on. Those who don't, go back into the ranks."

Ben took a deep breath of the thin sweet air of the apartment. He'd pass any trial they set for him.

"A leader has to learn to carry out orders without question. Even if he can't see the reason. He has to believe that any order a superior gives him is for the good of The Family."

"I can see that."

Al said, "Any orders you give Ben, he'll carry out."

His voice was very earnest. Ben felt embarrassment for him—in his nervousness, Al had taken his drink too fast, and now his tongue was loose. Mr.

Cost sat quietly, looking at him, his wide soft face without any expression at all.

Al said, "He's got this thing in him like you say, this tiger. He's a winner. I'm a loser, but I can recognize a winner."

Ben muttered, "Stop it, Al."

"It's all right," Mr. Cost said. "Go on, Al. I like to hear your opinion."

"Ben's a winner." Al nodded strongly. "He's going to go way up in The Family."

Mr. Cost shrugged. "Maybe he will. First he has to pass the trial."

"Any trial. He'll pass any trial."

Ben caught his uncle's eye, frowned, shook his head slightly. Al widened his eyes, then passed his hand over his mouth. He seemed to shrink back a little in his chair.

Mr. Cost said in his soft voice, "It's all right to talk, Al. This isn't like a public bar. There's nobody here you might be giving any little secrets to."

"Secrets?"

"I like to hear you speak up for your nephew. You never spoke up for yourself."

"He has the stuff. I never did. . . What was that about secrets? I never gave away any secrets in my life."

The fat man smiled. "Don't look so worried. It was just a remark."

He looked down at his glass. Then he raised his eyes to Ben. "What were we talking about?"

"You were talking about orders. About carrying out orders."

"Yes. That's one of the most important things for one who wants to be a leader. Maybe the most important thing. If a man can't take orders, he can't give them."

Ben nodded.

"And it isn't always easy. . . Well, imagine a situation like this. Imagine somebody in authority in The Family, maybe I myself, saying to you that a condition has come up, that there's a possible danger to The Family. Take care of this condition—not bang-bang, you understand, but in a quiet way. . . Would you say, I don't like this, but it's an order, it has to be carried out—would you be able to say that?"

He sipped his drink, watching Ben over the rim. "You'd have to be able to say that. You'd have to feel that what a superior orders has to be done."

After a few moments Mr. Cost said, "You can see that, can't you?"

"I can see it," Ben said slowly.

"Good." Mr. Cost was smiling a little, as he watched him.

Ben said, "What do you mean, in a quiet way?"

"I mean, like it was an accident, like down a flight of stairs, or somebody stumbling onto the subway tracks. . . You know, the way it could happen to a person who had something of a history of being under the influence."

Ben stared at Mr. Cost, at his small twisted smile. Then he turned to his uncle. Al was frowning, his lips pursed and his eyes serious, as he tried to follow the conversation.

Ben said, "I haven't heard any order, have I?"

Mr. Cost shrugged.

Ben said, "Is this the trial?"

"You're the fox, if you are a fox. If you are, you'll know. If not, it doesn't matter."

"I don't get that."

"Well then, forget it. Have another drink and forget it. Someone else will do it."

"Do what?"

"I don't have to spell it out. Not if you have fox in you."

"I don't know what I have in me. Maybe I don't have anything in me."

"Maybe you don't. That's what we want to find out."

"Why?" said Ben. "Why does it have to be done?"

"Because we see a danger there." Mr. Cost's voice was suddenly cold. "What are you doing, questioning me?"

Al said, "What's the matter? What's going on?"

"This is the trial then, is it?" Ben asked. "But why this? Why does it have to be this?"

"It has to be what I say it has to be. . . You may have a big future. I've got to know what you're made of."

"No." Ben shook his head. "Not this."

"So let it pass." Mr. Cost's voice was soft again. "Nobody's forcing you. Forget it. Have another drink before you go."

"Ben." Al leaned over, touched Ben's arm. "What's the matter with you? Listen to Mr. Cost."

"Shut up," Ben said.

"He doesn't mean it, Mr. Cost," said Al. "He's confused, a little nervous or something. He agrees with your point."

The fat man twitched his shoulders. "It's up to him. If he feels he isn't the man to do it, someone else will do it, that's all."

Ben got up. He felt something tightening in his chest, making it hard for him to breathe. He said to his uncle, his voice hoarse, "Shut up. You don't know what this is all about."

"So why should I? I'm not a fox, I'm just a soldier. All I know, he's giving you some trial. So tell him you'll do it."

"Come on. Let's go."

"What's happened?" Al spread his hands. "I don't know

what's happened. . . I'll talk to him, Mr. Cost. He'll come back and he'll explain."

"There isn't anything to explain. Everything's going to work out."

Ben stared at the fat man. "You think so?"

"A hunch, a feeling. . . I think you've got your father in you."

Ben was quiet, staring at him.

After a few moments, Mr. Cost dropped his eyes. "Come here, Al." His hand was in his pocket. "I want to give you something. . . I want to give you fifty dollars. I want you to go to a fine restaurant, get a fine meal, a fine bottle of wine. For once in your life. . . and wait, here's twenty dollars more. Get yourself a fine pair of shoes. Will you do that for me?"

Al looked at him, his mouth open. He held the money bunched in his hand.

"I want to do you this honor. And I want to do one more thing. . . Give me your hand."

The fat man took Al's hand in both his own, and put it to his lips.

Al said, his voice choked, "You shouldn't do that."

"I honor you, Al."

Al stood there, his face working.

Ben took his arm. "Let's go."

His uncle turned to the door. He was rubbing his thumb gently over his hand, over the spot where Mr. Cost had put his lips.

Mr. Cost sat there, looking after them with his flat, shining eyes.

In the elevator Al was still gently rubbing his hand.

"Why did he do that? Why?"

"Because he's crazy, that's why."

"Ben, what's the matter with you?" His uncle grabbed Ben's jacket. "You going to fail me? You going to throw this chance away? Why?"

Ben leaned against the padded leather wall of the cage, and closed his eyes.

His uncle said, "I don't know what happened in there, but whatever it was... think what this means! You got to think what it means—"

With his eyes closed, Ben said, "Did you like the air in there?"

"The air? Sure, it was fine. I mean, you could have stuff like that, air conditioning, an apartment like that..."

"The air gets bad as you go down. You notice how bad the air gets as you go down?"

"The air? I don't know about air. You breathe it, you need it. What are you talking about, Ben?"

"I hate this dirty air down here," Ben said, as the door opened automatically at ground level. "I don't think I can live in air like this."

They stood waiting for a cab. Al said, "Ben—"

"All right. Don't worry about it."

"It's going to be all right, isn't it?"

"Sure." Ben's voice was loud. "And you know what? We'll do like he said. Tonight we'll celebrate. We'll go to that fine restaurant and have that fine meal. And you know what? After we've finished the meal I'm going to honor you and kiss your hand."

His uncle didn't smile. Almost reverently he rubbed his thumb over his hand, where Mr. Cost had kissed it, and said in a serious voice, "I don't think you should joke. It was a solemn thing. He meant it."

"Sure he meant it. You're the old soldier, and tigers honor their old soldiers. We honor them the only way we know how."

Ben was laughing. But in the cab he started to cry. He looked at his uncle's cracked shoes and his worn cheap suit, and as his uncle stared at him in bewilderment, Ben put his face in his hands and cried.

# Gerald Kersh

## The Ambiguities of Lo Yeing Pai

*We admit it: this story is outrageous and bizarre. It couldn't happen; equally, it could happen—because it has a world-of-its-own logic and plausibility. In a phrase, a figment of the late Gerald Kersh's wild imagination . . . Read how Vara the Demon Detective solved a bizarre and outrageous mystery . . .*

### Detective: VARA

No offense to those who worship the worshipful—the speculation simply thrust itself into my mind: If Winston Churchill said of General Montgomery that he was “in defence invulnerable, in attack invincible, in victory intolerable,” what would he have had to say about Mr. Vara, the Demon Tailor of Columbus Avenue?

He had given the salesman fair warning: “My friend, what I don't want I've already got, and what I do want I can't afford; so good day to you!”

But the intruder pressed forward inexorably, with his big black bag, under the cover of a terrible barrage of high-explosive anecdotes and harassing, enfilading fires of small talk. Vara fell back on his base, to

the left of the iron stove. At a certain moment, when all seemed lost, he rallied and counterattacked. With a helpless-looking shrug, he said, “Well, sit in the cubicle a minute while I press out your suit a little.”

Before the salesman knew it, his trousers were in Vara's hands, and the intruder was cut off, nailed to the ground, surrounded. Vara, stony-faced, half smiling, his gray eyes glinting under knitted brows, bone-dry in the swirling smoke and drifting steam—all Vara needed was a black beret and two badges, as he said, “You invaded my shop to please yourself. Now you shall stay to please me.”

The salesman said, “Come

on, gimme back my pants, will you?"

"Make me nervous and I might burn the seat out of them."

It was *shrecklichkeit*. The man in the cubicle cried, "Give a guy a break!"

"What mercy did you show me?" asked Vara. Turning to me, he said, "I'm sorry to keep you waiting, but you see how it is. If it's not one thing it's another. 'Give me a break, mister—save my life—take a subscription to *The Gentlewoman's Evening Journal*; have your baby's woolen boots coated with bronze for two dollars seventy-five; give me a break, have your wedding photograph enlarged to life-size and colored in seven different colors; help me through college by taking a correspondence course on how to break horses and grow mushrooms in your cellar' . . . And now, if you please, this one here wants me to buy a neon sign!"

The salesman shouted, "Why not? Every businessman has a neon sign!"

"Oh, yes, I need a neon sign," said Vara. "When the wind is in the right direction, as far away as Central Park you can smell something like people being boiled in their clothes, and you say I should advertise Vara. Anyway, I've got one."

"Where?" asked the salesman.

"In the basement, in a box. Where else? I am told that it is a first-rate sign, as these things go. I've had it since 1937. It makes a glow in the sky when switched on. If you were passing five thousand feet overhead in an airplane you would see this orange-colored glow and you would know that here is where you go to have a button sewn on. Mrs. Vara bought it for me, for a present. She said—"

The salesman pleaded, "Have a heart, mister—I've got other calls to make."

"You should have thought of that an hour ago when I begged and prayed of you to please get the hell out of my shop . . . Mrs. Vara said, 'The time has come to expand or explode.' She had been listening to a lecture on Japanese Imperialism," said Vara, ignoring his prisoner and addressing me. "She said, 'Advertise!' I said to her, 'Advertise what? You remind me,' I said, 'of an occasion in Savile Row, London, when I was working for the great Schultz. It was just before we threw the Nizam of Hyderabad out of the establishment for contradicting us about the bias-cut of a heavy white shantung."

"There came into Savile



Row one morning a coalman leading a horse that was pulling a cart stacked twenty feet high with sacks, leaving a track of coal dust a yard wide. Both man and horse were covered an inch deep with tar and coal, and the man was shouting *Coal, Coal, Coal* in a voice to break windows with—a terrible voice.

"As I came by, a policeman stopped him and said, 'Hold your noise, can't you?' And the man said, 'What noise? How the hell are people to know what I'm selling if I don't call out?' This," I said to Mrs. Vara, "is a case in point."

"And I made it perfectly clear that a man like me could only be embarrassed by an electric sign. I told her to take a tape and measure the premises. I said, 'If I had as many as three customers at one time, two of them would have to make a line outside. Would you like me to put up a marquee while we're about it?' I said, 'Let us waste no more breath, my dear; my mind is made up—over my dead body you'll put up a sign in my shop!'

"Next day the sign was up in my window—a neon one; and of a color so frightful that it actually made a buzzing noise, a high-pitched buzzing noise! And it was so unbearably brilliant in itself that it made my premises totally invisible, if

only because no human being could endure it at close range. Now I ask you, what does a peace-loving man do in a case like that?"

The question was a rhetorical one, but the salesman was into the opening like a desert fox. "You trade it in—we give a liberal allowance—for a Marvex No-Daz."

Ignoring him, Vara said, "In a case like that, a diplomatic family man considers ways and means of harmless sabotage. This infernal sign, in addition to blinding and deafening me, also roasted me, for it gave out a great heat. So I waited until it was at its hottest and then threw water over it."

"It could have burst, one of them old-fashioned signs," the salesman said.

"It did. It burst," said Vara. "But my relief was not long-lived, because Mrs. Vara had procured with it a replacement guarantee. Within twenty-four hours it was back, worse than ever. So I tried quietly working on its joints, which seemed to be stuck together with black tape, with a screwdriver."

"You could have electrocuted yourself, with one of those," said the salesman.

Vara said, "I did; and from that day forth I have been a firm opponent of capital punishment, American style. Hang

a man, yes; guillotine a man, yes; and as for gas chambers, they leave me unmoved—living as I do in this shop. But that electric shock gave me a lot to think about for many a day, believe me.”

“Now with a Marvex—”

Eying the salesman with grudging approval, Vara said, “One can’t help admiring this man . . . I say, I alone was the sufferer. The sign developed a neuralgic kind of tic, which made it wink and flicker, but it remained quite as sturdy as before, and doubly offensive. So I bided my time. In the first place, Mrs. Vara was expecting an addition to our family. It is unwise to upset her at the best of times, but absolutely foolhardy to do so when she feels delicate. One must give and take, in marriage. Besides, she had taken a fancy to that sign and when she came uptown she liked to admire it from across the avenue.

“In the second place, it was April; the days were getting longer and in a little while I’d be closing the shop before lighting-up time. I would be able to switch the sign on, lock up, turn away, and go home, without giving the thing one unnecessary look. I leave a night light burning, anyway, I thought; so let the damned sign burn itself up.”

“A Marvex is—”

“Please shut up. Let’s have a cup of tea. You wouldn’t appreciate this,” said Vara to the salesman, “but this gentleman will.” He handed me a lacquered tea caddy “A very extra special Lapsang Souchong, I am told,” he said, “with some kind of flowers in it which Mrs. Vara believes to be opium. She won’t let me have it in the house—she thinks that everything Chinese is full of opium.

“There was quite a scene when I took this tea home. I said, ‘A present from Mr. Lo Yeing Pai.’ He is an old friend of mine. She said, ‘I knew it all along. This was all I was short of. Opium! Get out of my sight, you Fu Manchu, you! A Broken Blossom he wants to make of me, the Generalissimo! Take it away, you Chu Chin Chow, you! A proper little Genghis Khan he turned out to be, the shrimp . . .’ et cetera, et cetera. I didn’t dare to give her the tortoiseshell-and-ivory back-scratcher—that would have been the last straw, let alone the pot of pickled lichees. So let’s have a cup . . .”

“Please, mister, a joke’s a joke—” the salesman began.

“Oh, you want your clothes, do you?” said Vara, with a malicious grin. “Calm. A cup of tea induces calm. I can chat for hours and hours over a cup of

tea. Would you like a fortune cookie? Where was I? Oh, yes, Mr. Lo-Yeing Pai—philosophy—signs, et cetera. Mr. Lo liked signs—signs and omens, for although he was a very intelligent man he was quite superstitious. This, I daresay, was because he was an inveterate gambler, like so many Chinese. It is not a vice peculiar to Chinese people. All poor people are gamblers; all gamblers believe in luck; so poor people in general are superstitious.

“That,” said Vara, with some complacency, “is a syllogism. Mr. Lo and I used to have long philosophical talks about it. He was something of a philosopher and I don’t mean ‘Confucius say—’ and all that nonsense, in spite of the fact that Mr. Lo was the spitting image of Charlie Chan as played by Warner Oland. The Chinese used to love Charlie Chan because they found him wryly comical—in China, he was believed to be a humorous portrait of a typical American policeman. Mr. Lo didn’t mind cultivating the resemblance. It even pleased him to be called Charlie

“He had fourteen suits, all identical, of superfine black broadcloth, which I looked after for him, and he wore only silk shirts—by which you may guess that he was in a solid way

of business. He and his partner, Han Sing, had a store four blocks up the avenue—mysterious Oriental novelties, wholesale—backscratchers, dinner gongs, Buddhas, joss sticks, chopsticks, dragons, teeny little ashtrays, soapstone statues—you know the kind of thing.

“Who wants them is the only mystery. Backscratchers, for example—has anybody ever seen anyone *using* a backscratcher? Yet they sell by the million. Perhaps they get worn out passing from hand to hand, since no sooner does anybody get one than he gives it away.

“Anyway, Mr. Lo and Mr. Han made a lot of money, and lived decent regular lives. No opium, no dancing girls—Mrs. Lo, who was the exact opposite of Luise Rainer in *The Good Earth*, would have had something to say about that—no trap doors, no nothing. Their only employee was a withered little bookkeeper, one Washington Foong Soh—not even a flower-faced girl in satin trousers.

“You couldn’t imagine a more respectable pair of tradesmen. Even in their little dissipation they were quiet and inoffensive. It was like this: Every week, generally on a Thursday, Mr. Lo, as the younger and more active of the two, went downtown to the docks to meet a boat and check in a consign

ment of goods from abroad, which came in, more often than not, very late at night. So on Thursday evenings Lo and Han had an amiable sort of stag party.

"They would close the shop at six o'clock and go uptown to their favorite restaurant for a long-drawn-out Chinese dinner for goodness-knows-how-many courses. After dinner they would return to Columbus Avenue, go into the comfortable little parlor—for Han, being a bachelor, lived on the premises—and they would open a bottle of arrack, and sit down to play cards. That was all there was to it.

"The game they played was some abstruse form of stud poker, with twelve cards, and an unbelievably complicated system of drawing and betting. Mr. Lo tried to explain it to me once, but I couldn't grasp it. He told me that only good friends should play that game for money—and there was no point in playing it for love—because it admitted of about seventy-five different ways of cheating, all of which was part of the fun of the game.

"What was more, he explained, if you played only for pennies even, the raising and betting went in such a manner that you could lose a hundred dollars in a quarter of an hour.

And Lo and Han played for quarters, and from nine o'clock until sometimes three in the morning!

"I once said to him, 'But surely, my dear sir, such a game must be sheer murder?'

"He said, 'Oh, yes. It is nothing for one of us to lose fifty or sixty thousand dollars at one sitting.' I said, 'How can you afford it?' He laughed, and said, 'Why, you see, we understand each other so perfectly well, and are so evenly matched, that it almost invariably comes down to the plain run of the cards. At the end of the year Han might be a thousand dollars ahead, or I might be a thousand dollars ahead of him—nothing more. It is a fake, really. We have all the excitement of playing for huge stakes, and only a fraction of the risk. Last year, for example, eight hundred thousand dollars "changed hands" between us, and I ended three hundred and fifty dollars and fifty cents down. The year before that we played for a million, and I won nine hundred. This year—but the year is young—I am losing, to date—' he looked it up in a little notebook—'one hundred and eighty-seven thousand, seven hundred and five dollars and twenty-five cents. It is great fun. We are very solemn about it. Han takes out his lucky

mascot and invokes it. I twist my lucky ring around on my finger and call on it to stand by me. Then we go to it, serious as owls.'

"I said, 'It would be too rich for my blood. Once, when I won twenty-three dollars on a horse, I jumped so high with joy that I sprained my ankle coming down. And when I have a touch of fever I have nightmares about what happened to me when I lost it back again, and the names Mrs. Vara called me—Nick the Greek and Monsieur Zographos and Lord Sandwich and The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo . . . Well, good luck come Thursday, Mr. Lo.'

"He turned the so-called lucky ring round and round on the little finger of his left hand and went on his way.

"But that Thursday night he had very bad luck indeed. If it were a laughing matter I should be tempted to say that at dinner Mr. Lo's chow assumed a sinister mien, because he came away with indigestion. To palliate it, he drank more arrack than he was accustomed to, and this gave him a headache. The headache caused him to play badly so that he lost and lost until, at half-past one, he threw down his cards and with appropriate apologies said he'd play no more that night.

"Then he walked very leisurely in the open air for an hour or so, to clear his head, but got caught in a spring rain-storm and was soaked to the skin. He arrived at the docks in good time, but the boat was late. When it did arrive, Mr. Lo had some bother with the Customs, and had to pay excess duty on some manufactured articles or other.

"He arrived home at nine o'clock on the Friday morning, and went straight to bed with hot tea and aspirin tablets. But just as he was relaxing and breaking out into a gentle perspiration, the police arrived and said they were glad to see him there because they wanted him rather badly; and would he kindly put on his pants and come along?

"Naturally, Mr. Lo asked, 'What's the matter?' The police said, in effect, 'Nothing that a jolt of electricity won't iron out, Mr. Lo. You murdered your partner, Mr. Han Sing, you know; but if you cop a plea, the District Attorney will no doubt so arrange it that you get away with life imprisonment.'

"Lo was horrified. 'Who would murder Han Sing?' he asked. 'You,' the police replied. 'You were practically seen doing the job. Anyway, we aren't charging you just yet; we just insist that you come along

and make a statement concerning your movements last night.' So Lo Yeing Pai was taken away, while Mrs. Lo, with an inscrutable look, drew—"

"—a Chinese dagger out of her sleeve!" cried the salesman, interested in spite of himself.

"A thousand dollars out of the bank," said Vara, "and took it to Mr. Lo's lawyer who, going into the matter forthwith, found that things did indeed look black for my friend her husband. The facts were as follows:

"Two decent, sober, and industrious young brothers named Mahaffey, who lived in the Bronx, having attended a fund-raising party for Free Ireland at Fingal's Restaurant on Columbus Avenue somewhere in the Eighties, were on their way home. The time was about half-past two in the morning. They were making their way to a subway station on Broadway.

"As they walked they dawdled—it was scarcely worthwhile their hurrying to go to bed—commenting on the funny names some people have, who own businesses in uptown Manhattan—like Rappaport, Van der Beek, Gwinnett, Sardikichi Sato, Disselboom, Trattoria, and so forth—and expressing a natural fear that one day the country would be so entirely given over to foreigners that an

immigrant would have to emigrate before he got his first papers.

"I mention all this for a specific purpose, as you will see—they were looking at shopkeepers' names, I repeat. After a while the younger of the brothers said, 'And will you look at that one, then!' And he pointed out the neon sign that burned perpetually in the window of Mr. Lo's shop. It read: LO YEING PAI, and under Lo's name, HAN SING. And even as the boys marveled at this bit of cosmopolitanism, who should come out of the side door but no less a person than Charlie Chan himself—or Charlie Chan's double—in a round black hat and a long black raincoat, smoking a cigarette in an ivory holder! He looked left and right, and then, furtively ducking his head, ran off in the direction of Broadway by way of a cross-street.

"The Mahaffey brothers walked a little farther, exchanging light comments of no importance. Then, a patrolman coming by, they checked on the whereabouts of the subway—they being strangers in this part of the town—and the policeman being a man named O'Halloran, they swapped a few civilities. The elder Mahaffey mentioned that he had just seen Charlie Chan himself coming out of the

Chinese-sounding shop across the way.

"The officer said, 'Oh, he'll be Mr. Charlie Lo, and a very nice sort of man.' I daresay he added a few 'At-all-at-alls,' and here or there a 'Begob-and-begorrah'—I have never heard any such expressions in actual use, but fifty thousand comedians can't be wrong.

"The brothers Mahaffey continued on their way, and O'Halloran proceeded on his beat. His beat eventually took him to the door of Lo Yeing Pai's and Han Sing's establishment. He gave that door a perfunctory push, and found it unlocked. This was irregular in general, and in particular because the partners had installed a new and noisy burglar alarm.

"So the policeman went in, and he found poor old Han Sing dead in the parlor, his head beaten in with a stone doorstep carved in the shape of a lion, and sprawled in a mess of scattered cards. In his pocket was a note of hand whereby his partner Lo Yeing Pai acknowledged a debt of some two hundred and sixty thousand dollars. So there was motive, weapon, and also opportunity, for a number of people remembered having seen the two Chinese shopkeepers returning to their place of business at nine that evening, as they did every Thursday.

"Now it so happened that I was away from this shop on that weekend. Mrs. Vara was presenting me with a daughter at that time, and although I knew there was nothing I could possibly do to assist further in this affair, still . . . Mrs. Vara and I may not see eye to eye about everything in the world, but let a crisis occur and one or the other of us is sure to be within shouting distance. All went well, I am glad to say. So I first heard about the murder on the following Monday.

"Questioned, Mr. Lo became nervous. You see, he didn't hope to be believed. He made too much of what he had been brought up to think of as Occidental insularity and pragmatism. Little did he know—Americanized though he was—that we of the West, who survive from joke to joke, live by such a cockeyed metaphysics as the East never even dreamed of!

"Anyway, his statement didn't ring true, quite apart from the fact that he put a very weak face on it. Did he owe Han over a quarter of a million? Well, yes—that is to say, no—he did, and he didn't. Had he sat down to play cards with Han at nine in the evening? Yes. Had they quarreled? Lo said yes, of course; they invariably quarreled when they played cards; it was part of the game to quarrel.



Suspicion of cheating, perhaps? No suspicion of anything; he and Han were friends. They never suspected each other; only enemies suspect each other. Only enemies dare not quarrel.

"What is it you want of me?" he asked them. 'I have nothing to hide. I was playing badly, so I stopped playing. I went out. I walked downtown, slowly, smoking cigarettes, until I realized that I had left my good-luck ring behind me. Before I left I washed my hands. Before I washed I took off my ring. It is not a valuable ring—a bit of white jade, unimportant—but I am superstitious about it. So I went back, having plenty of time. I remembered having left it in the soap dish. But when I got to Columbus, at 75th Street, it occurred to me that Han Sing would, most likely, have gone to bed. I had my key to the store, of course; but still I didn't want to disturb him. I looked at my watch, and it was twenty minutes to three. I decided I had better ride back downtown in a taxi. Then it started to rain, and so, still having time to spare, I stepped into a doorway for shelter.'

"They wanted to know what happened then. He answered, 'Why, nothing. There was a shower. I smoked a cigarette and waited. The rain stopped. I

hurried towards Broadway, where there is always more chance of picking up a cab.' 'You were alone?' they asked him. 'Certainly.'

"Then they said, 'Two sober and responsible witnesses saw you coming out of your own shop at about a quarter to three, and mentioned the matter to the patrolman on duty there.' Mr. Lo said, 'If my enemies want to swear my life away, I cannot help it.' And he would say no more.

"I said to the detective whose trousers I was pressing, and who told me about it, 'There is something here that is several degrees less than kosher. I smell a rat.'

"He said, 'Ah, Mr. Vara, there's no getting to the bottom of the Oriental mind. They're devious, deep, tortuous.'

"'Tortuous your granny!' I said to him. 'Get that idea out of your head. You can't understand the Chinese because they're so incredibly simple, that's the trouble. They had printing for ten thousand years, and never put out a newspaper. They had gunpowder for ten thousand years, and never made anything worse than a fire-cracker. They had philosophy for ten thousand years, and never got half as tortuous and devious as Swedenborg. I dare say you have read Swedenborg,'



I said. He had not; neither had I; but no matter.

"I said, 'I believe Lo to be an honest man, and I don't believe he's lying.' The detective said, 'So are the Mahaffey boys—they'd starve before they lied.'

"I said, 'They could be mistaken.' 'Nothing's altogether impossible; I guess,' said the detective, 'but tell me, how many Chinese shops owned by Lo Yeing Pai and Han Sing are there in these five or six blocks? The boys told the cop, O'Halloran; O'Halloran found Han Sing, his body still warm; Lo Yeing Pai was positively identified—his story simply doesn't stand up, it's unsupported, it doesn't even ring true. What more do you want?'

"I said, 'I don't know. I want *something* more. The facts, as you call them, are at war with my instincts; I simply can't swallow them. I don't think Lo Yeing Pai *could* have killed his friend.'

"The detective asked what Mr. Lo was to me, anyway. I replied, 'A customer, nothing more, but that's neither here nor there: Schultz and I have thrown royalty out of our shop on a matter of principle, and this is a matter of principle.'

"The detective laughed coarsely, and said, 'What you keep on telling me, chucking people out—were you in a

wrestling ring, or something?' I said, 'Speaking of rings, did you find Mr. Lo's jade ring where he said he left it?' 'Yes, in the soap dish.' 'And did you find poor Han Sing's little bunch of golden slugs?'

"I explained to the detective that each partner had his lucky charm. Lo's was a jade ring. Han's was a small bunch of little cubical slugs of virgin gold, stamped with an old Imperial mark; they used to be a kind of special royal currency in Peking, long ago. Han had six of them on a gold cord—he was forever toying with them, twirling them around his finger, throwing them from hand to hand, and so forth.

"The detective said, 'No, nothing like that turned up.' I warned him, 'That might be important.'

"When he was gone, it being lunchtime and there not being much to do in the shop, I went out for a breath of air and a glass of beer—or, more properly, since I went to Magruder's Saloon on the corner; a breath of beer and a glass of air. Magruder called his hole-in-the-wall The Shamrock Grill.

"When I got there he was having trouble with his bright green electric sign, according to which his house was now called The Sham. I watched the operations of the electrician, while

Magruder called alternately on the Devil who, he said, was the begetter of electric signs, and on Saint Jude, the patron saint of hopeless cases.

"I slapped myself on the forehead and cried, 'Got it!' so that Magruder growled that whatever it was that had bitten me, I must have brought it in myself. But I said, 'Give everybody in the bar a drink on me.' 'There's nobody here but yourself,' said Magruder, and I said, 'I know that—do you take me for a complete fool? Have one yourself, and when that workman is done, send him over to my place.' 'Your sign need fixing too?' Magruder asked. And he never spoke a truer word!

"I hurried to the telephone and called Mr. Lo's lawyer, Claude 'Contingency Clause' Cohen, and told him to come over at once because I had news for him. He turned up, and I said, 'Mr. Lo is innocent.' He said, 'Everybody is innocent until proved guilty, but my clients are more innocent than most. What have you got?'

"'First,' I said, 'please confirm what I think—that the case against my friend Lo Yeing Pai rests on the testimony of those two boys who saw him coming out of his own store at half-past two o'clock or so that Thursday morning.'

"Cohen said, 'Quite right;

and it doesn't look like there's any way of persuading them, or O'Halloran, that they might have been mistaken. If only Lo could be the same size as other Chinese! But no, he's got to be taller and weigh two hundred and twenty pounds. Generally, you can trip a witness in cases of this sort on the ground that to a non-Oriental person all Chinese and Japanese look alike. But Lo's too conspicuous. It's troublesome, troublesome. But come on, what's on your mind?'

"'But what if the brothers Mahaffey were four blocks away at the time?' I asked him. He said, 'Well, then the case against Lo would go *phut!*'

"'Step across the street with me for a moment,' I begged him. 'The weather is clouding over. Let me first switch on my sign.'

He shrugged and followed me over the Avenue to the Spanish grocery store that used to be just opposite here. 'You know that Lo Yeing Pai's and poor Han Sing's establishment is some distance away?' I said. He said, 'I know perfectly well where it is. Make it snappy, whatever it is—I'm a very busy . . . Hey!'

"His eye was following my pointing finger, and he was looking right into the window of this self-same shop in which

we now sit—this identical private non-profit-making enterprise into which every Tom, Dick, and Harry with a sample case and a line of salestalk feels he has a right to intrude with his ‘Gimme a break’ and his ‘Have a heart!’

“And looking, Claude ‘Contingency Clause’ Cohen, before whom all District Attorneys tremble, now that I have made his reputation for him, cried, ‘Hey!’ and ‘Utterly incredible!’ and fell on my neck.

“I said to him, ‘Now all we need do is retrace the Mahaffey brothers’ itinerary from Fingal’s Restaurant,’ checking with a photographer—but who am I to teach you your business?’ And Cohen said, ‘You have already taught me my business, Mr. Vara. If only you’d been through law school I’d make you a partner.’

“I said, ‘Oh, yes, I can just hear Mrs. Vara on that subject: Erle Stanley Vara, Perry Shrimp, et cetera; and “Come on, Dashiell, tear up my nightgown and kick me in the face,” and “The meat loaf isn’t good enough for Nero Vara—bake him a couple orchids.” No, I thank you, Mr. Cohen; as I am, so let me be.’

“And we went together to Lo’s place, and he refreshed his memory of the outside of the shop, with its sign that said, in a

roughly vertical Chinese style:

LO  
YEING  
PAI

HAN

SING

“And ‘Oh, brother!’ was all Claude Cohen could say when we parted.

“So. That same night, at about ten o’clock, the Mahaffey brothers were walked along from Fingal’s—retracing their way as of the night of the murder—and at a certain point they said, ‘There’s the place.’ ‘Are you sure?’ they were asked. ‘Positive!’

“‘You are positive that it was from out of that doorway you saw the gentleman coming, the Chinese gentleman who, as you informed Patrolman O’Halloran, looked like Charlie Chan?’ ‘Sure as can be, the one we identified, we take our oath!’

“They were told, ‘But this is not the place where the murder occurred.’

“The Mahaffeyes replied that they knew nothing about any murder at that time, and cared less; and if they’d known there’d be all this to-do about harmlessly remarking on somebody’s looking like a character out of a movie they’d have kept

their mouths shut when they talked to a copper. They were informed that the sign they were now looking at belonged to one Mr. Vara, and was on the blink, out of order, ill-connected. In the daytime this sign said:

TAILOR  
DYEING  
REPAIRS

HAND  
PRESSING

"But remember the neuralgic tic the sign had developed, the winking and flickering? Well, finally some of the letters had stopped fluttering and blacked out. So at night all the neon sign showed was:

LO  
YEING  
PAI

HAN  
SING

"And so the case against Lo Yeing Pai broke down—a simple matter of observing the Oriental ambiguities of an Occidental neon sign," and Vara handed the salesman his freshly pressed pants.

He, dressing, said, "Somebody must have killed that Han Sing."

Vara said, "Naturally. As I suspected, it was Washington Foong Soh, the bookkeeper. At six that evening, when his employers, who were at the back of the shop, thought he had let himself out after saying good night, Washington Foong Soh slammed the door but stayed inside. He hid behind a screen. He, too, was a gambler; but a desperate one, and in debt around Mulberry Street.

"He had heard Lo and Han mentioning the huge sums that supposedly changed hands every Thursday night, and made up his mind to rob Han Sing after Lo had gone. The old man heard him, and so Foong knocked him down with that stone lion. He said he didn't mean to kill old Han, and since he confessed right away he only got fifteen years or so.

"My instincts apart, I knew Lo couldn't have done it when I heard that Han's lucky mascot was missing—Lo Yeing Pai would never have stolen a thing like that; but the likes of Washington Foong couldn't have resisted it.

"The police collared him when he tried to pawn it at a place on Sixth Avenue—seven ounces of virgin gold, worth more than the cash he took after he killed Han."

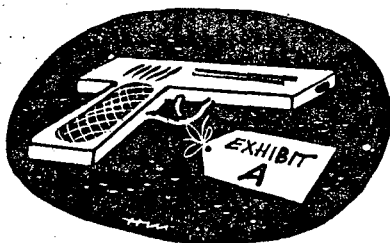
The salesman asked, "How much was that?"

"A hundred and forty dollars in cash. Then again, there was the circumstance of the burglar alarm being switched off, and the shop door left open. A businessman, instinctively, would close his own shop door. But I don't know why I waste my time telling you all these things. As I was saying, before I was interrupted, I don't want a neon sign; I've got a neon sign; neon signs are ambiguous and misleading—"

"But a Marv—" A certain

glint in Vara's eye stopped the salesman in mid-word. "Okay, I'm going," he said.

The door closed behind him, and Vara, composing his face into its customary expression of pity and pain, began in a hushed voice to tell me that my fine old whipcord trousers were so full of lesions as to be beyond mortal aid, and that I must brace myself for the worst and buy a new pair. Which I gladly did—Vara's story was worth it.



# Michael Gilbert

## A Gathering of the Eagles

*All the threads came together in Bonn, Germany, on Christmas Eve, and they wove a fascinating pattern of international intrigue. The stakes were incredibly high—indeed, it could be the greatest Intelligence breakthrough since World War II . . .*

*So once again the game's afoot. Once again follow the trail with Calder and Behrens in one of their most intricate secret operations—a tangled web of mishaps and miscalculations, a complex network of strokes and counterstrokes, of ploys that failed and coups that succeeded . . .*

### Secret Agents: CALDER and BEHRENS

Squadron leader Leopold, late of the R.A.F., but now attached to the Foreign Office, took the early morning flight from London Airport to Frankfurt on December 24th. This Christmas Eve flight had been totally booked for several weeks, and Leopold had to use his priority rating to get a passage. Technically, this meant that he occupied the spare seat, kept for such emergencies and usually the perquisite of the off-duty air hostess. Actually, he spent most of his time on the flight deck talking to the pilot, an old friend of his.

Leopold was carrying his

operational passport, which was made out in the name of James Bellingham, and described him as an insurance broker. His complete luggage was a canvas flight bag into which he had thrust a few overnight necessities when he received the emergency call at eleven o'clock the night before.

At Frankfurt he transferred himself and his bag into the small two-seater craft which was waiting for him, and which landed him, in a heavy shower of sleet, at an old army airfield, seven miles outside Bonn, at eleven thirty. Here he was met by Captain Massey, the Military

Attaché at the Embassy. Massey hurried squadron leader Leopold straight out to the car, which he was driving himself, and started off with him down the little-used secondary road which joins the airfield to the city of Bonn.

These facts were all established, beyond reasonable doubt and on the evidence of reliable witnesses, in the inquiry which followed. What was less certain is exactly what happened next.

The car was spotted by a farm worker, at mid-day, upside down in a drainage culvert. There were long greasy skid-marks on the surface of the road and a gap had been torn in the fence guarding the vertical drop over the culvert. Mr. Fortescue, a naturally suspicious man, was inclined, in the end, to accept the simple verdict that the car had attempted to turn a corner too fast on a bad surface, had been unable to straighten out, had hit the fence and gone through it, overturning in the process. The drop of fifteen feet had been quite sufficient to account for the fact that the necks of both men were broken.

The Sergeant of Police, on the scene within ten minutes, was an intelligent man. He saw the diplomatic badge on the car and phoned the Embassy.

The First Secretary himself took the call. Martin Seccombe was a diplomat of the old school. He was not fond of the Military Attaché, nor had he approved of the undercover activities which seemed to be part of his job. Nevertheless, he had categorical instructions which came from too high up to be flouted, and he knew precisely what steps had to be taken.

He therefore personally encoded and dispatched a message which was received in London at one o'clock, and which was passed immediately to D.I.6, with a copy to Mr. Fortescue.

At mid-day on that same day Josef Bartz, a clerk in the Dispatch Section of the Bonn office of the Great Polish Electrical Combine—which was known through Eastern Europe simply as “P.D.” and was a world pioneer of electronic computers—closed his ledgers and locked them in his desk. The firm stopped work at mid-day on Christmas Eve, and it was customary, at this point, for the annual bonus to be handed out, with a personal good-will message to all his employees from the head of the firm in Warsaw. It was gestures of this sort which inspired P.D. to describe themselves as “a happy family.”

On this occasion the bonus was a large one, and the happy

family atmosphere was particularly marked. Executives who had bought Christmas presents for their secretaries took this opportunity of presenting them personally; people called on friends in other Departments; a sprig of mistletoe appeared over the door of the ladies' lavatory; and the whole interior of the P.D. building, which normally presented an appearance of smooth and decorous efficiency, bubbled over for the space of a single hour with life and high spirits.

Josef seemed to have a great many friends. He visited almost every Department in the building.

One of these was in the basement and the notice on the door said, *Head of Messengers*. A riotous party was going on here, and Josef was invited to join it. He was only in the room for five minutes, but during this time he managed to reach out with his foot and kick over, unnoticed in the gaiety and bustle, a switch under the Head Messenger's desk.

When he left, Josef took an elevator straight up to the managerial floor and made for the office of the Communications Manager. He knocked on the door and when he received no answer looked into the room and found it empty. This can hardly have been a surprise to

him, since he had watched the Communications Manager, a quarter of an hour before, going into the Board Room.

Josef walked across quickly to the desk under the big turret window. It was a massive affair of steel, bolted to the floor, with a nest of small drawers on each side of the knee-hole. Josef said quietly to himself, like a child memorizing a lesson, "Fourth drawer from the top on the right-hand side."

The drawer was, as he had been told it would be, locked.

He felt in his jacket pocket and pulled out a curious set of keys. Some had triangular shafts, some had a series of small wards no larger than pin heads, some had hollow shafts with no visible wards at all.

Josef was sweating now. A prickle of perspiration stood out on his forehead and the palms of his hands were wet. In his haste he dropped the ring of keys and scrabbled for them on the carpet. It seemed to his strained senses to be an eternity before he knew that he had found the right one. It went easily into the tiny aperture and engaged the matrix of the lock with a reassuring click. Josef turned the key, and the drawer slid open.

This was the crucial moment.

If anyone had discovered



that the switch in the Messengers Room was off and had switched it on again, an alarm would sound, emergency doors would close the staircases, the power in the elevators would be disconnected, and the street doors would be locked. Everyone would be not only a prisoner in the building, but immobilized on the floor on which they were when the alarm went off.

Josef ran to the door, opened it, and listened. Life seemed to be continuing normally. He could hear the hum of the elevators going up and down, and shouts of laughter from a room on the floor below. No alarm.

He ran back to the drawer, extracted from it a flat gray metal box, about the size of a book but much heavier. This box went into his brief case, which was already bulging with papers. He slammed the drawer shut, wiped the front of it with his handkerchief, and also remembered to wipe the front edge of the desk, where his left hand had rested.

A moment later he was out of the room and descending the staircase to the floor below. He was calmer now. The worst was over.

Controlling his impatience, he joined a party in the Dispatch Department, and spent five minutes with them. Then

he made his excuses, strolled to the cloakroom to pick up hat, coat, and overshoes from his locker, wished the giant doorman a "Happy Christmas," and walked out into the street.

It was a quarter to one, and the sleet had turned to snow.

At five minutes past one, Mr. Fortescue in London was talking on a private line to Mr. Calder's cottage in Kent. He said, "Get your car and drive straight to London Airport. You'll be away for two or three days. I'll meet you in the departure lounge."

At ten past one Mr. Calder's car was rolling out of its garage.

"Fortunately," said Mr. Fortescue, "there's an extra mid-afternoon flight for Dusseldorf. I've booked you onto it. It's about the only fortunate feature of the whole business. Behrens should be down here by this evening. I had to get him back from Leamington. I'll put him on the evening plane to Cologne."

The loudspeakers were announcing the departure of the Dusseldorf flight, but Mr. Fortescue ignored them. There were things he had to tell Mr. Calder, even if the telling of them held up the flight.

When he had finished, Mr. Calder said, "Do you think that the car crash *was* an accident?"

"I've no grounds yet for

supposing anything else," said Mr. Fortescue. "We sent Leopold by a round-about route via Frankfurt and private charter. I don't see how the opposition could possibly have anticipated this, or how they could have made effective arrangements in time."

"I think you're right," said Mr. Calder. "Unfortunate that it should have happened when it did."

"You have a gift for understatement," said Mr. Fortescue. "I've arranged for Corrie to meet you. He'll give you the local picture. It isn't an entirely happy one, I'm afraid."

The loudspeaker made a third plaintive announcement of the departure of the Dusseldorf flight and Mr. Calder walked out onto the runway, a thick nondescript figure in a belted mackintosh, carrying a worn airplane flight satchel strapped to one shoulder and the lives of a number of people in his hands.

Josef Bartz reached the Embassy at ten past one. It would have been quicker if he had taken some form of transportation, but despite the weight of the brief case he was carrying he preferred to walk. He suffered his first shock when he found that the public offices of the Embassy, the entrance to

which was tucked away in a side street, were locked.

After a moment of indecision he walked round to the main door of the Embassy. This was open, but guarded by a commissionaire who looked doubtfully at Josef.

"I have to see Captain Massey," said Josef. He spoke fair English.

The commissionaire said reluctantly, "In here, sir," and showed Josef into a waiting room furnished with four hard chairs, a table, and a portrait of the Queen. Josef put the brief case down along the front of the chair and sat with his legs over it. Twenty minutes passed. Outside, the snow fell softly.

The commissionaire returned, bringing with him a young man with a long, sad, horselike face who introduced himself as Mr. Ware. Mr. Ware was, it appeared, a Third Secretary. He had come to Bonn almost directly from Oxford and his recruitment to the Foreign Service was one of those things which happens even in the best organizations.

Mr. Ware explained to Josef that Captain Massey had had an accident. Well, yes, quite a serious accident. His deputy was, unfortunately, in Greece. If Herr Bartz would come back, after the holiday was over, a temporary replacement for Cap-

tain Massey would, no doubt, have been found, and he could deal with whatever business it was that Herr Bartz might wish to discuss.

Josef, his face suddenly pinched and white, said, "Impossible. I *must* see someone. It is of the highest importance. It cannot conceivably wait."

When he had said this three times, Mr. Ware sighed, rose to his feet, and said that he would have a word with the First Secretary. As he went out he said to the commissionaire, "There's a loony in the waiting room. Better keep a careful eye on him, Forbes."

Martin Seccombe, disturbed at his lunch, listened briefly to what his junior had to report, and said, "Sounds like one of Massey's shady friends. He can wait till Monday," and returned to a consideration of the ginger pudding which was one of the specialties of the Embassy chef.

Five minutes later Josef was out in the snow, still clutching his brief case.

John Corrie met Mr. Calder at Dusseldorf, and during the forty-mile drive Mr. Calder was happy to let Corrie do the talking. He knew of him as an agent of the modern school, better at languages than at judo, more adept with a cipher machine and a computer than with

a gun or a knife; but a thoroughly-reliable operator.

Corrie said, "It's not an easy set-up here at the moment. I'm all right, personally. The office looks after me and backs me up. It's people like Massey I'm sorry for. The Embassy's got one of its holier-than-thou fits on. It's not the Ambassador's fault. He has his hands full doing his diplomatic work. I think the root of the trouble is the First Secretary, and some of the junior officials. Their policy is entirely negative. *Don't stir up trouble, don't give any cause for provocation. Suppose there is a microphone in the Ambassador's drawing room, what does it matter?* We're so bloody discreet that anything we say can safely be relayed to Moscow or Peking.

"It would be all right if the other side would play the same game, but the East German government has a very strong and active organization right here in Bonn. It's not just an information-gathering outfit. It's equipped for strongarm stuff as well. If ever there was a showdown, one of their first objectives would be to paralyze the government machinery in Bonn. The authorities here know it. They're not happy about it, and they'd like to take a strong line, but they don't know where to start. I've been

getting a lot of cooperation from them lately. Lammerman, who's head of the Security Police here, has been particularly helpful. He put me onto Josef Bartz, and we worked this plot together. Damn this snow. If it gets any thicker, the roads will be blocked before morning."

"Tell me about the ploy," said Mr. Calder.

"We've had our eyes on the P.D. outfit for some time. Headquarters in Warsaw, a very elaborate communications set-up with senior operatives all from the Eastern Zone. But we could never crack it. Its security was too good for us. Then Lammerman managed to get at Bartz, who was actually in the Dispatch Section. He handled him in the usual way—paid him money for general information and copies of messages which were of no use to us because we couldn't decode them.

"Then he put the pressure on—offered him a very large sum for the coding machine itself. Bartz said that if we could supply him with the right keys, he could lift the machine during the jollifications which go on before closing time on Christmas Eve. But he insisted that we give him political sanctuary in England. Reasonable enough, really—he'd be a dead duck in Bonn.

"That's where Massey came

in. He got the keys—it meant squaring the people who'd made the desk, but he did it—and when everything was set, he arranged for Leopold to come over to escort Bartz back to England. He had a private plan laid out for this evening, but now it won't be able to get off the ground."

"Where's Bartz now?" said Mr. Calder.

"Right now," said Corrie, "he's safe and sound in our Embassy, waiting for you to chaperone him on his journey to England."

Josef came cautiously round the corner of the road in which he lived. A man was standing in the doorway opposite his apartment house; and there were two more in a parked car twenty yards along the street.

Josef turned in his tracks and stole back the way he had come. But that way was blocked too. The Director must have checked on the coding machine before leaving. He could imagine the flurry of orders. Any member of the Dispatch Department would be automatically suspect—particularly, those who had left the building early. If they had searched his desk, they would have found that the office carbons of all the messages he had sent in the past twelve months

were gone too. That would have clinched the matter.

The brief case weighed a ton. It was dragging his arm out of its socket. His first impulse was to throw it into someone's front garden. His second was that something might yet be salvaged from the mess.

There were two things he had to do: he had to deposit the brief case in safety and he had to find somewhere to spend the night.

The first, he thought, might be managed; there were private luggage lockers at all the rail and bus terminals. The second might not be so easy.

Mr. Calder said to Martin Seccombe, "You did *what*?"

"We had no instructions about him. The best we could do was to ask him to come back after the holiday when someone, presumably, would have put us in the picture about him."

"And that was the best you could do, was it?" said Mr. Calder. "What was the worst? Shoot him out of hand?"

The First Secretary flushed. He did not like Mr. Calder. He disliked his appearance—and his tone of voice. Above all, he disliked his lack of respect for the acting Head of Her Britannic Majesty's Embassy.

Before he could say any-

thing, Mr. Calder added, "I suppose you realize that Bartz was bringing us not only the coding machine, but copies of all messages which had gone to Warsaw in the last year. When we'd decoded them we should have been able to identify the whole East German machine, and the police would have cleaned it up, so that it would have stayed that way for a considerable time at least."

Martin Seccombe had got his breath back.

He said, in what he hoped was an icily diplomatic voice, "I have no connection with Intelligence matters and no desire to know any details of them."

"Odd," said Mr. Calder. "Most people like to know *why* they've been sacked."

Martin Seccombe stared at him.

"When I report personally to the Head of the Foreign Office, as I shall when I get back, that you and this young man—" he swiveled round for a moment to look at Ware, who shifted uncomfortably under that baleful glare—"have, by your pompous stupidity, jeopardized one of the finest Intelligence breakthroughs since the war—and probably cost the defector his life—you'll both be out of jobs." He paused at the door and added, "Or maybe he'll move you to Saigon."

"What now?" said Corrie, as they climbed back into the car.

"We'll call on Lammerman," said Mr. Calder, "and see if he's got any ideas."

Colonel Lammerman, who was tall and thin and effected an eyeglass, said, "We originally got onto Josef Bartz through Mulbach. You know him, I expect."

"I've heard of him," said Mr. Calder. "I've never had the pleasure of meeting him."

Franz Mulbach had been one of the heroes of the German anti-Hitler movement, had saved his own life by luck and good judgment after the July plot, and was now Deputy Speaker in the Bundeshaus. His name was respected in English Intelligence circles.

"If he has gone to anyone for help, he will have gone to Franz," said the Colonel.

"Is there any reason why he shouldn't simply have booked in at a hotel?—under another name, of course."

"On any other night in the year, perhaps. Not on Christmas Eve. The hotels will all be full. Families come in from the country to finish their shopping and look at the lights. The restaurants and beer cellars stay open until all hours. He might get a room in one of the not very reputable hotels in the Red Light district north of the river,

but that would have its own perils."

"If he doesn't go to a hotel, what do you think he'll do?"

"Walk the streets. Keep out of sight. And if he does that," said Colonel Lammerman, "he will be lucky to stay alive. Our Eastern friends are very strong among the taxi drivers, and news vendors. They buy their allegiance, of course."

He turned to his second-in-command, a stocky Prussian of half his height and twice his girth, and said, "You will alert all forces—Civil Police, Military Police, and our own Special Patrols—to the possibilities of the situation. Our Patrols should be doubled and the necessary extra arms issued."

"I've got a feeling," said Corrie, "that this might be a lively night. I see that it's stopped snowing."

At six o'clock Ernst Doring, who specialized in daylight hotel robbery, stepped cautiously out of one of the little streets leading to the main line station, and started to cross the Square diagonally toward the station entrance. He had had an excellent afternoon and the bulging brief case grasped in his right hand contained an assortment of transistors, cameras, and personal jewelry.

When he was three-quarters

of the way across the Square, a parked car flicked its spotlight full onto him. Ernst hesitated, turned, and ran. The car started up. It caught him before he could reach the shelter of the back streets. Three men jumped out. One hit Ernst in the stomach. As he doubled up, the others caught him and hauled him into the car. The brief case was thrown in on top of him, the car reversed and it roared back across the Square.

So quickly was it done that the policeman standing on the far pavement could hardly believe it had happened. As the car came toward him he jumped into the roadway and drew his revolver.

The car struck the policeman squarely with its left-front fender, skidded on the frozen snow, recovered, and raced off down the Kaiser Allee toward the river.

Franz Mulbach lived in an old house on the Furstenberg Allee. He received Corrie and Mr. Calder in his first-floor living room, overlooking the river. Mr. Calder noticed that although the house was old, the fittings were not. The original fireplace, which must have been big enough for the traditional yule log, had been filled in and a monstrous imitation electric log fire twinkled in front of it.

There was concealed lighting in the old plaster cornices, and a large television set filled one corner of the room.

Franz Mulbach himself was a large man—huge shoulders, topping a barrel chest which rested shamelessly on a Falstaff of a stomach. Dressed in traditional white shirt, lederhosen, and shoulder harness, he looked like an enormously inflated school-boy.

He welcomed Corrie as a friend, pressed glasses of schnapps into their hands, and said to Mr. Calder, "I know an old friend of yours—Mr. Behrens. We were together at one time during the war. A remarkable man."

"He should be here before midnight, unless all flights are grounded."

"So? A gathering of the eagles. Is there trouble expected?"

"We are in trouble," said Mr. Calder, and told him about it.

When he had finished there was a short silence. Then Mulbach said, "Poor Josef. I have known him for nearly fifty years. We were at school together."

It seemed such an inadequate comment that Mr. Calder looked up in surprise. There was a hint of embarrassment in Mulbach's voice. But there was more than that. There was a



note of reserve, and something else, almost the last thing he had expected to find in this stout phlegmatic man: the side-tones of fear.

He sensed that a direct question at this point might lead to a rebuff. Instead, he said, "Who are these people hunting Bartz?"

"Scum," said Mulbach. "Professional criminals. Out of work bullies. In the days of Hitler they wore brown shirts and drew their pay for doing his dirty work. The State no longer pays for services of this nature. Therefore, they are at the disposal of the Eastern Machine, who will pay them to hunt down anti-communists."

"Mercenaries?"

"The trade of the mercenary was an honorable one," said Mulbach. "They insult it. They'd sell one employer to another for a few extra pfennings. They mix private vendetta with business. They—they make me sick."

But they frighten you, too, thought Mr. Calder.

There was nothing more to be gained. As they rose to go, Mulbach said, in the manner of someone picking his words very carefully, "If Josef had come to me for advice, I think I should have told him that his best chance of safety was in the Red Light district. The women there

are rapacious, but independent and not dishonorable."

As they drove back to Police Headquarters, Mr. Calder said to Corrie, "I think Josef did come to our friend for asylum. And I think he turned him away. Rather surprising for someone with his record."

"Mulbach is getting old," said Corrie. "Too old to tangle with hooligans. He doesn't want a bomb in his car the next time he drives to the Bundeshaus."

A telephone rang in the penthouse flat of one of the leading dental surgeons in Bonn and a voice said, "I am afraid that the subject will not now return to his flat. It has been watched continuously since two o'clock this afternoon."

"Keep one man there. Just in case."

"Very well. You heard, perhaps, that we had a little trouble earlier in the evening?"

"I heard about it."

"It was unfortunate. We got hold of the wrong man."

"He is none the worse for it, I hope."

"Not a bit. I'm afraid we hurt the policeman, though. He should not have got in the way. I think it will mean trouble."

"If they want trouble," said the dentist, "we can give them trouble. Call out all our reserves. Their first job will be to



comb through the brothel area. Is that understood?"

"Bed by bed," said the voice at the other end of the telephone.

Since the war a new Bonn has arisen from the ashes of the old. It lies to the south of the river and contains the Parliament House, the government buildings, and the respectable homes of the functionaries who work in them. But north of the river the remains of the old town still cluster round the Electoral Palace and the shell of the Minster. This is a place of small cobbled streets, ending in flights of steps, dark courts and blind alleys.

The least respectable part of this disreputable quarter lies between the Stefanienstrasse and the Lichtentalerstrasse. The Hotel Wagram stands exactly halfway along the road joining these thoroughfares.

Red Maria was so called on account of her hair, not her politics. She dispensed her favors from a room on the first floor at the back of this hotel, and was a woman of undoubted attractions, but uncertain temper. When she heard the knocking she climbed out of bed, padded across the floor in bare feet, opened the door six inches, and said, "Go to hell, stinking little monkey. I am

busy."

It was the proprietor of the hotel who had knocked. He said apologetically, "There are men downstairs, Maria. They insist on coming up."

"Am I an octopus? Can I attend to more than one man at once?" said Maria. She slammed the door and bolted it.

Five minutes later came a renewed knocking, this time heavier and more urgent. Maria ignored it. A body crashed into the door. This was too much. Maria got up, seized a bottle from the top of the chest of drawers, and unbolted the door. As she did so, the man outside charged again. This time the door gave way and he came in with it. Maria hit him with her bottle.

There was a scream from upstairs of "Police!"—followed by a crash of broken china and a series of bumps, as though a heavy body were being thrown down the stairs.

The man on the bedroom floor groaned and got up onto his knees. Maria, her flaming hair a red aureole around her bare shoulders, raised her bottle again. The man fumbled in his pocket, jerked out a gun, and pulled the trigger.

The shot missed Maria and hit a looking glass over the mantelpiece. Maria threw her bottle at the man and ran out

onto the landing.

Outside, in the street, the shot had been heard. Two men jumped from a waiting car and ran into the hotel. At that moment a police car turned the corner of the Stefaniensstrasse and came rocketing down the streets, its spotlight playing on the front of the hotel. Three of the Feldgendarmarie tumbled out. A fusillade of bullets from the first story stopped them in their tracks. One man was hit, and rolled back behind the car. The other two dove for shelter.

This was the beginning of the Battle of the Hotel Wagram, which ultimately involved five carloads of the irregular forces and more than forty policemen.

Mr. Calder, back at Police Headquarters, listened to the reports coming in. Colonel Lammerman, who was directing the police side of the battle by telephone from his desk, seemed unperturbed at the damage and casualties.

"Tonight," he said, "they show their hand. Good. They are forced out into the open. Better still." He spoke to the Commandant of Military Police, and ordered more reinforcements to rush to the scene.

At one o'clock, when the shooting had died down and the casualties were being counted and the first batch of prisoners

were being rounded up, the door opened, and Mr. Behrens walked in. Considering that he had been lifted from the ninth tee on the Leamington Spa Golf Course by a military helicopter, transported to London Airport, put on the night flight to Cologne, and driven by fast car to Bonn, he looked remarkably cheerful and unruffled.

Mr. Calder greeted him with relief. Mr. Behrens' knowledge of Germany and things German was a great deal more extensive than his own.

"You seem to be having quite a party," said Mr. Behrens.

"More like Walpurgis Night than Christmas Eve," agreed Mr. Calder. He sketched an outline of the proceedings so far.

At the end of it Mr. Behrens said, "Do I understand that when you visited Franz Mulbach you got the impression that Bartz had asked him for asylum, and been refused?"

"He didn't actually say so, but that was the implication."

"And you thought he had turned him away because he was afraid of retaliation?"

"That's the general idea," said Mr. Calder, looking curiously at his old friend. "Could I have been wrong?"

"I've heard a lot of odd stories tonight, but that tops the lot. Franz Mulbach afraid!

He hasn't a nerve in his big fat body. He's been a fighter all his life. Do you remember what Schiller made old Wallenstein say?—'*Ein ruheloser Marsch war unser Leben*'—'our life was a restless march.' People like that don't change, you know."

"If he wasn't afraid, he was putting on a good act."

"Maybe," said Mr. Behrens. "And I wonder why. Do you think we could venture out into the streets without getting shot?"

"The police could lend us a car."

"I'd rather walk," said Mr. Behrens. "I've spent the last twelve hours being driven by other people. I'd like to stretch my legs."

The snow underfoot had frozen and it squeaked as they walked on it. They avoided the main roads and went by quiet residential streets. There were still lights in a few of the windows, and the sound of singing and music as families sat together to welcome once again the dawn of the Christ child's birthday. In the half mile between the Police Station and Franz Mulbach's house they met not a single soul.

There were lights in the Mulbach house, too, and it was Franz himself who opened the door. He had changed out of his lederhosen, and looked a great

deal more business-like in a turtle neck sweater and short leather coat. He had one hand under the flap of the coat, and Mr. Calder noticed that he only half opened the heavy front door, in such a manner that it shielded him but left him a free field of fire.

He peered at them for a moment, then swung the door wide open, jumped out, and started to pump-handle Mr. Behrens' right arm.

"All right, Franz, all right," said Mr. Behrens. "I'm glad to see you, but you don't need to break my arm."

"What a Christmas present!" said Mulbach. "My old friend! What a wonderful surprise!"

"It surprised me, too," said Mr. Behrens.

"Come in, come in." He led the way to the first-floor living room and switched on the lights. Mr. Calder saw that the windows were now shuttered. "The occasion calls for the best brandy."

While their host was pouring out the drinks, Mr. Behrens peered curiously around the room, as if weighing its possibilities. Then he accepted the bulbous glass from Franz Mulbach, sniffed the contents with appreciation, and said, "Where have you put Josef Bartz?"

Mulbach did not even blink. He sniffed at his brandy and

said, "This came from Strohe at Klagenfurt. Poor Josef. Yes, he was very upset."

"I can understand that."

"I wonder if you can? He was frightened for his own skin. That was natural. He was also bewildered. When the emissaries of a country that has a reputation for keeping its word say to a man, 'Steal this for us, then come straight to our Embassy and we will guarantee your safety.' When they say this and then turn him away from the doors of the Embassy—"

"It was partly our fault," said Mr. Calder. "And partly our misfortune. If Captain Massey had not been killed—"

"Killed? I heard nothing of that."

"An accident, we think."

Mr. Calder told him, and when he had finished, Mulbach swiveled round to look directly at Mr. Behrens. "When I heard Josef's story I concluded that there had been a change of plan—that it now suited your purpose, for some deep reason, that he should be caught."

"It's one of the occupational hazards of Intelligence work," said Mr. Behrens, "that when you do something simple and straightforward everyone suspects a double motive and a triple bluff. It happened just as Calder said."

"So. But there is one thing I

do not yet see. Why should you suppose that I would have Josef here?"

"*'Ein ruheloser Marsch—'*" said Mr. Behrens.

"You remember that," said Mulbach, delighted. "Schiller is a great poet, yes?" He repeated the words under his breath, savoring them. Then he said, "I will give you back another quotation. From Goethe, this time. You know what he said was the greatest ordeal? *'Sich zu beschränken und zu isolieren—'* to be small and alone." Allow me to present you—"

As he spoke he must have pressed some sort of spring, for the side wall of the old fireplace pivoted back on itself, revealing a narrow opening—just large enough to accommodate a man. Out of it stepped a still apprehensive Josef Bartz.

At six o'clock that morning Colonel Lammerman said to Mr. Calder, "A highly satisfactory night's work. I do not think that the Sturm-gruppen of our Eastern friends will function properly again for many months. We have lost one man—the first, the one who was run down by the car. He died an hour ago. And we have six wounded, two quite severely. They have three dead, sixteen wounded, and we have thirty-

three prisoners in our hands."

"Will this enable you to break them for good?"

"That would be too much to hope. The central organization—the men at the very top—are still out of our reach. I doubt if any of the hired bullies who took part in tonight's maneuvers even know the names of the top men."

Mr. Behrens scribbled something on a piece of paper and passed it to the Colonel.

"Does this name mean anything to you?" he said.

The Colonel looked at what was written, then said sharply, "Where did you get that information?"

"From a very old friend," said Mr. Behrens. "I don't think he'd like to be quoted."

"I imagine not," said the Colonel. He tore the paper into small pieces, then dropped them into the fire. "You will appreciate that in his legitimate business this man has many powerful friends and allies. If I, myself, suggested anything against him, and could not prove it to the hilt, I should be in more danger than he."

Mr. Behrens walked over to the window. The first gray light of morning was beginning to steal back into the sky. "I imagine it should be quite possible for a light plane to take off from the Airport."

"I would think so," said the Colonel. "Why?"

"A thought has occurred to me. There will be no regular service. But suppose we asked the Air Line—suppose, in fact, we appealed personally to the Chairman, as a favor to the State—to arrange for a transport craft to be available—to fly, shall we say, a *valuable cargo* back to London?"

The Colonel stared at Mr. Behrens for a long moment in complete silence. Then, for the first time that night, a smile creased his face, broke, and dissolved into a harsh bellow of laughter. He rose to his feet and stamped across the floor. "*Wunderbar!*" he said. "*Kolossal!*" Then he stopped laughing and said, "But dangerous."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Behrens. "There's some risk, certainly. They mightn't rise to the bait at all. But give them plenty of time. We don't want the plane before nine o'clock."

It was an Army Transport Command medium-sized personnel carrier, with removable seats, one of a number which had been sold to the Air Line in the late fifties when it was replaced in service by the D.C. all-purpose model. The Air Line used them for transporting staff.

Mr. Calder, as he climbed on board at ten o'clock that morning, noticed that four seats had been installed on each side of the gangway. He surmised that they were to have an escort.

Josef Bartz climbed in behind Mr. Calder. Bartz had had an uneasy two hours of sleep in a cell at the Police Station and the white glare off the snow accentuated the grayness of his face. Behind him came Mr. Behrens, carrying Josef's brief case.

Christmas, and the snow, had combined to empty the airstrip and its approaches. Mr. Calder was glad to see this. They were going to need plenty of room to maneuver.

Two Volkswagens suddenly appeared from the crew quarters. They carried, between them, six passengers. Two were clearly the pilot and co-pilot. The other four were less easy to place. Their overalls suggested airline mechanics; their build, professional wrestlers; their faces, policemen.

"They're doing us proud," said Mr. Behrens. "I think I recognize that pilot. Isn't it Merker?"

"The Luftwaffe ace?"

"I think so. His co-pilot looks like an ex-Luftwaffe man, too."

"Agreed," said Mr. Calder. "You can't mistake them. Any more than you can mistake an

English naval officer in mufti."

The cabin crew were climbing on board. Smiles and greetings were exchanged. The largest of the four large men introduced himself as Major Osler.

"We have had special instructions," he said, "to see personally to the safety of you—and your cargo."

He glanced round at Josef who had sunk back into his seat, and was staring glumly out at the snow-covered expanse of the airfield.

"I'm only sorry," said Mr. Calder, "that you should have been forced to work on Christmas Day."

"In an affair of national importance," said Major Osler, showing his strong teeth in a smile, "the loss of a Christmas holiday is of minor importance."

The Major closed the door and fastened the safety catches. The pilot had switched on now. They could hear the four motors starting their warm-up. Josef was fiddling with his seat belt.

"No need to fasten yourself in yet," said Major Osler. He explained. "We have to taxi out to the far runway. We shall be ten minutes or more—"

He stopped, as the pilot called out, revved up his engines, and then, unexpectedly,

switched them off.

The nose of an armored car had appeared from behind the Administration Building. It came slowly onto the runway. Behind it came three more. They fanned out, one coming to a halt immediately in front of the airplane, two of them flanking it, and one behind it. Once in position, they too switched off their engines.

Mr. Calder stood up. He ignored the gun which had appeared in Major Osler's hand, and the ugly look on the Major's face. In the silence which had fallen, Calder's voice was loud enough for everyone in the airplane to hear.

"It's no use, Major," he said. "You're outgunned." As if to underline his words, the turret of the nearest armored car swung directly toward them and they looked into the barrels of the twin Vickers. "You can't move the plane while those cars are there, and any one of them could blow your tail off with a single burst. Relax, Major."

"In case," added Mr. Behrens mildly, "you should think it worth some desperate move, let me assure you that the property you were instructed to fly to Eastern Germany is *not* in this brief case. It is in a safe in the Airport, under armed guard. All I have here—" he opened the brief case "—is two

bottles of schnapps and a Christmas present for my aunt."

For a moment Mr. Calder thought that Major Osler was going to use his gun anyway. Then the bright light died in his eyes, and his face resumed its look of stony indifference. The faint beginning of a smile lifted the corner of the thin mouth. The Major said, in the tones of a fencer whose guard has been penetrated, "*In Ordnung, mein Herr.*"

"We had bad luck and good," said Mr. Calder to Mr. Fortescue. "Bad luck about Massey and that idiot Martin Seccombe. I hope something *will* be done about him and Ware, by the way. But good luck with Franz Mulbach, and the best of luck—the very best—at the end. I was quite sure that if we applied to the Air Line to help us, they would seize the God-sent opportunity to hijack the three of us, and the coding machine, and fly us straight to the Eastern Zone."

"It was a very feasible counterstroke," agreed Mr. Fortescue. "But how could you be sure?"

"The head of their organization," said Mr. Calder, "whose name Mulbach gave us happens to be Chairman of the Air Line."



# Charlotte Armstrong

## The Light Next Door

*We have linked Charlotte Armstrong's "The Light Next Door" with Patricia Highsmith's "The Empty Birdhouse" in what might be called "A Pair of Strange Stories"—and that they are. Strange, both of them—but utterly different from one another. And yet we have the oddest feeling that in some mysterious and magical way the two authors started with basically the same "germ" of an idea. If that is so—and judge for yourself after you have read the two stories—how interesting that the plots should grow and develop so differently, should evolve into such totally different stories. . .*

H<sup>A</sup>ving loafed all morning, Howard Lamboy was improving the holiday afternoon, but Miggs, the dog, thought that raking leaves in the back yard was a jolly game, and a part of the fun for him was to scatter all the piles. After much haranguing, and gesturing with the rake, Howard had just conceded that he was never going to get anywhere until Miggs was banished indoors. He had his hand in the dog's collar when the pouched face of his neighbor poked around the back corner of the garage. It was followed by the thin body, which stationed itself on the other side of the knee-high hedge.

"Hi," said Ralph Sidwell,

with his usual gloomy diffidence.

"Oh, hi, Ralph," said Howard. "How's every little thing?" Then he bit his tongue, because the man was a bridegroom, and his bride; whatever else, was certainly not little; and while Howard was filled with normal human curiosity he hadn't meant to be crude.

"Fine," said Ralph absently. "Say, by the way, that dog of yours made off with a pillow from my place. Seen any traces?"

"What?" Miggs was writhing, head to tip of tail, like a line of light on choppy water. Howard let him go, and the dog gamboled over to the hedge to



sniff welcome. The neighbor looked sourly down at the Dalmatian.

"Now, what's all this?" said Howard genially. "What the devil would Miggs want with a pillow? He's got a pillow. No, I haven't seen any traces. What do you mean?"

"Francine," said Ralph coldly, "put a bed pillow out on the back balcony to air and it fell off the railing. Your dog hauled it away."

"I don't believe it," said Howard. "Where is it?"

"That's what I was asking you."

"Bed pillow?" Howard was incredulous. "I doubt he'd bury a thing like that, you know."

"Well, it's gone," said Ralph gruffly.

"Well, I'm very sorry," said Howard, "but I don't know a thing about it and neither does my dog."

"How do you know he doesn't?" said Ralph. "My wife saw him."

"She recognized him?" Howard was stiff.

"Black and white spots," said Ralph in triumph.

"Well, well! Only black and white dog in the world, eh? I can tell you, Miggs didn't bring any bed pillow home, and you tell me where else he would have brought it."

"He did *something* with it,"

said Ralph stubbornly.

"I don't think so," said Howard. "Excuse us, please?"

He grabbed the dog's collar again and dragged Miggs off to the kitchen door.

"What's the matter?" said Stella.

"Oh, boy!" said Howard eloquently.

After a while he told her.

"Okay," Stella said, "Miggs didn't do it. So it's a mistake. But, Howard, what makes you so mad?"

"Aw, it was his attitude."

"In what way?"

"So damned unreasonable."

"Listen, he's only been married two days," said Stella. "It's whatever her little heart desires, for gosh sakes."

"Fine way she's setting up diplomatic relations."

But Stella said, "A second marriage; at their ages, is probably pretty upsetting. Have a little human understanding."

"Well, it's Miggs I understand," said Howard. "I know him better, for one thing."

The fact was, he didn't know Ralph Sidwell at all. Howard was 44 years old and his neighbor must be in his middle fifties. Howard preferred to think of this as a whole other generation. Ralph and his first wife, Milly, had been living next door when the Lamboys moved in eight years ago. While the

Sidwells had not called, they had been pleasant enough over-the-fence; but the relationship had never become more than a hot-enough-for-you or sure-need-rain sort of thing.

Milly Sidwell, a personality of no apparent force, had taken a notion to die in the distance, having succumbed, according to the newspaper, while visiting relatives in Ohio. When the widower had returned, without a wife or her body to bury here, the Lamboys had bestirred themselves to make a condolence call. This had evidently either surprised or alarmed the man to the point of striking him dumb. It hadn't been a very satisfactory occasion.

Later Stella had asked him over to dinner, three separate times, which invitations Ralph had refused, as if he couldn't believe his ears, and they must be mad. So the Lamboys had given up. For the last three years Ralph Sidwell had lived alone, next door, taking his meals out somewhere, coming and going with a minimum of contact. The Lamboys, being involved in warm and roaring communication with their neighbors on the other side, didn't miss what they had never had.

Now, suddenly, Ralph had taken unto himself a second wife.

The Lamboys had not been invited to the wedding which, indeed, scarcely seemed to have been a social occasion. Wednesday morning (only yesterday), Ralph had been standing in his own driveway when Howard drove out; Ralph had hailed him, and had announced, rather stiffly, that he had been married on his lunch hour the day before. He wanted the Lamboys to meet the bride.

Howard had shut off his motor and got out of the car in honor of the news. (The least he could do!) Stella had come running out in her morning garb of robe and apron, and Francine Sidwell—the widow Noble, that was—had come out of her kitchen to be presented.

She had been dressed neatly. (Stella confessed later that she had felt mortified, herself.) But there was no better word for Francine than “fat”—unless it was “enormous.”

Stella reported that after Howard had driven off to his office they had told her that they had first met in a laundromat. “She’s a marvelous cook,” Ralph had said, and that was the end of the conversation.

Although Stella said mischievously that probably Ralph only wanted to make sure they didn't think he was living in sin, she was prepared to accept and

adopt a neighborly approach. But it was only right to let them severely alone for "a while"—a period that would correspond to the honeymoon they evidently were not taking.

This was only Thursday. Howard was thinking, with human understanding, that a second "honeymoon" might not be all honey when Miggs, that lovable clown, placed his jaw in warm devotion on Howard's ankle. "That's my fella," said Howard. "Love me, love my dog."

This wasn't what he meant. He didn't expect the Sidwells to love him, but they ought to notice what *he* loved.

On Saturday, Howard was out moseying along the line of the scraggly hedge between the lots and wondering what the hedge disliked about its situation, when Ralph Sidwell came out of his own back door, marching, to accost him.

"Now," he said, with no other preliminary, "you are going to have to tie that dog up." He pointed at Miggs, whose name he ought to know perfectly well, with a shaking finger. "We have a right," he sputtered, "to hang anything we like on our own clothesline and have it safe. Your dog—"

"His name," said Howard coolly, "is Miggs."

"Your stupid animal," said Ralph, "has taken my great-grandmother's patchwork quilt! And that's a priceless heirloom! It can't be replaced." He was shouting. "My great-grandmother made it when she was a girl!"

"Hold it," said Howard. "Now calm down, will you?"

"By hand!" yelled the neighbor.

"Listen, I'm sure she did," said Howard. "But what has that got to do with Miggs? He wouldn't take a quilt off your clothesline."

"If he didn't, who did?"

"How would I know? I suppose your wife saw him again? She must have spots before her eyes."

"Don't you insult my wife!"

"Then quit insulting my dog."

"Where is my great-grandmother's quilt?"

"I haven't the faintest idea and I couldn't care less!"

Miggs, getting into the spirit of things, began to growl. Stella came running out of the house. "What are you bellowing about?"

By now Howard was speechless. Ralph was still pointing at Miggs.

"Oh, honey?" Out of the back door of the other house (identical in floor plan except that right was left) came the

bride. Francine was hurrying and her flesh jiggled and bounced. She had in her arms a patchwork quilt, all blues and whites and greens. "Oh, honey," she panted. "Look, I found it. It's all right, I found it."

"Well!" said Ralph hotly. He turned and gave Howard a hard glare. The look said: Don't you dare say I shouldn't have been so mad at you, because I am *still* mad.

Miggs, who understood hostility in every language, even the silent ones, barked, and Francine clutched the quilt and began to walk backward. (Was she afraid?) Howard rose in his wrath and simply strode past the hedge. "Let me see that," he demanded.

Francine screamed lightly.

"Hey, Miggs, whoa!" cried Stella, grabbing the dog's collar and hanging on with all her weight.

Ralph Sidwell said, "Don't touch it. That's *mine*."

"Yours, your great-grandmother," yelled Howard. "You show me my dog's toothmarks or his claw prints or *any* evidence—" He snatched up the quilt by a corner. It was a lovely old thing, on the fragile side. Francine kept backing away, and Howard had to let go to keep from tearing the treasure. "For your informa-

tion," he howled, "my dog doesn't eat tomatoes."

"Okay, I apologize," Ralph screeched, as angrily as he could.

"Oh, honey, I'm sorry," Francine was saying to her bridegroom. (She was afraid?) "Oh, listen, Mrs. Lamboy, I'm so sorry—"

Stella bent her head as if she were the Queen and Francine the commoner. "Come, Miggs. Come, Howard," she said, rounding up her own fierce creatures.

They persuaded Miggs into the house. Howard flung himself down in his den and poured some beer and did it wrong and caused too big a head and swore and blew out his breath in a long "Whew!" The dog lay down at his feet and thumped the floor with his tail, waiting for praise. "That's right, pal," said Howard. "You didn't do it, did you? Darn idiots!"

Stella was cooling off, by herself, in the kitchen, and it didn't take her long. She came in and said. "We're not going to have this, you know."

"Darned right."

"I mean we're not going to have any feud on," she said grimly. "Of all the miserable things in this world a feud with neighbors is the stupidest. And

*we* are not going to have one."

"Okay. Let them lay off my dog."

"What's this 'my dog' all the time?" she said. "He's my dog too, and I love him dearly; and I know he's not guilty, as well as you do. But I am not going to get into a silly fight with neighbors. Ralph apologized."

"Yeah, some apology," Howard scoffed. But he saw her point. He wasn't really as childish as this. So it was agreed that Stella would call on her neighbor, as soon as seemed correct, and—well, just do the right thing and be neighborly.

So on Monday morning, Howard being at work, Stella made a luscious pie. She phoned Mrs. Sidwell and announced that she would like to come over and call. Would three o'clock be all right? Francine, in a fluster, said it would, of course.

So Stella dressed herself nicely, but not too formally, and went down her own front walk and around on the public sidewalk to the neighbor's walk and up to their front door and rang the bell. She had been in this house only once before. She had no way to assess what changes the new mistress may have made in the decor or the atmosphere. The house was neat to the point of seeming

bare. It "felt" like a man's house. But Ralph was not there.

Francine had dressed herself more or less "up" for company. She made exclamations over the high pie, delicate under its burden of whipped cream. She took Stella into the dining room and produced coffee with which she served generous portions of the peace offering. Stella, eating her own pie (and she wished she didn't have to because *she* did count calories), made the normal approaches.

The weather. Bright days. Cool nights. How long the Lamboys had lived here. That they had a daughter away at college. Just the one child. That the houses were small but comfortable, weren't they? A development, yes. You would hardly know any more that they were all alike, what with each owner using paint and trellis, shrub and vine, in an individual way. This had always delighted Stella. But Francine wanted, she said, the recipe.

Oh? Stella recited the recipe for her pie. And how did Mrs. Sidwell like the neighborhood?

Well, Francine thought it was very nice and the house was very nice and the market was very convenient and the pie was *delicious*! Oh, yes, she had been a widow for some years, all alone, yes, and she *was* enjoying this pie. Would Mrs. Lamboy

take another piece? No? Then Mrs. Sidwell would.

Stella, smiling and murmuring, watched and listened and thought to herself: No wonder she's so fat! She also was getting a strange impression that the woman beside her was, in truth, a gaunt starving creature, and the flesh in which she was wrapped was a blanket to keep cold bones from shaking apart—an insulation to keep fine drawn nerves from splitting and shattering at the slightest sensation. But everything was going smoothly, on the surface, so Stella brought up the matter of the quilt.

She was so glad it had been neither lost nor damaged.

Francine said, "I washed and ironed it and it's as good as new."

This seemed to Stella to be an odd way to speak of an antique, but she went on to deplore any misunderstanding about the dog. "We know his habits so well, you see. He is really a harmless old fellow. Wonderful with children. Oh, he loves everybody, including burglars, I'm afraid. Of course, maybe you are a cat person? I seem to remember Mrs. Sid — oh, I'm sorry."

Francine was staring at her. Her features were lost in the rounded flesh. It was hard to imagine what kind of nose or

chin she had. But her eyes were peering out of their rosy nests, and surely there was fear in them.

"All I meant," said Stella, "some people adore cats and can't stand—" (She hadn't meant to mention the first Mrs. Sidwell—she must be more careful.)

"I don't care for pets, not much," said Francine and stuffed and totally filled her mouth with whipped cream.

After a decently brief interval Stella went home, thoughtful and a little dismayed. She told Howard at dinnertime that there was now peace, and for pity's sake not to break it. Because peace, she went on to confide, was about all there could ever be between Stella Lamboy and the woman next door.

"It's not that I don't like her," Stella said. "It's just that I didn't find one thing—there's just no—well, maybe it isn't fair after only fifteen minutes but there wasn't *one* spark! The only thing she seems to care about is food. She didn't want to know what I care about."

"Obviously," said Howard, "she doesn't care about being fashionably slim."

Stella shuddered and wondered why she did. "She admitted she doesn't care much for pets," she said. "But she's

not—well, aggressive about it.”

“Miggs can coexist,” said Howard loftily, “as long as there is no aggression from out across the border.”

But he was thinking: Who would spill tomato juice on an antique patchwork quilt? Or was it something else that I saw on it? The color of—blood?

That night Howard got himself trapped in the Late Show. When he took Miggs out on his leash it was after midnight. The street was quiet; the tweedy dark was fresh and cool. As he ambled down the block, with the dog's eager life tugging, kitelike, on the leash in his hand, Howard fell into what he sometimes called, to himself, his “cosmic” thoughts.

Suburban, ordinary, these undistinguished rows of boxes, set among the trees, all silent now. What have we here, he mused. Everything commonplace. You betcha! *Commonplace* stuff—like birth, death, love, hate, fear, hope. In his imagination he could lift the lids from some of these boxes, lift them right off. He knew one box that held patient suffering, another that rang with music all day long. He couldn't help telling himself that every box on the street was a package of human mystery—which was quite commonplace, he thought complacently.

When he turned at the end of the block it was his fancy to cross over and come back on the other side of the street. Suddenly, in the upper story of the house next door to his—the Sidwells—he seemed to see a wash of light. No room lit up. But something paler than the dark had washed along the windows from the inside. Burglars, he thought at once. There it went again. Howard began to walk on his toes, although now the house remained dark, and Miggs hadn't noticed anything.

Howard crept on until he was directly across from the Sidwell house and there, again, came that washing light, from inside, but now on the ground floor.

He hauled on the leash and struck across to his own house, keeping an uneasy eye to his right. Stella was asleep in her bed, trusting and innocent and alone. He must be careful. But his own house seemed to breathe in peace, so he stood quietly on his own porch until Miggs whined a question. Then he unlocked the door and took the dog in.

Miggs curled around on his own cushion in the kitchen and Howard patted the freshened fur, meanwhile peering out the window. There was a light of some sort in the kitchen over



there, across the two driveways. But there was a shade, or drawn curtains. He couldn't quite see in. And he could hear nothing.

Nothing was happening. No more mysterious glimmers.

Finally, Howard locked all his doors and went up to bed. But he kept his ear on the night, until he remembered there was a better ear than his, downstairs.

The next morning, as Howard went to get out his car, he heard a futile whirring and whining in the Sidwells' garage. So he leaned over the hedge. "Trouble?"

It seemed that Ralph was going to work (so much for honeymoons!) but his darned battery— He wasn't going to drive Francine's old crate, either. So Howard offered him a lift. They discovered a useful coincidence of routes, Ralph ran into his house to give Francine his Auto Club card, then got in beside Howard, breathless and grateful.

Ralph worked for the Gas Company. He'd get home all right. A fellow worker lived not too far from here.

"Say," said Howard after a while, "anybody prowling around in your house last night?"

"What?"

"Well, I just happened to be

walking the dog. Wondered if you had a burglar," Howard went on cheerfully.

"I wake up once or twice," said Ralph, bristling. "I'd know if we had a burglar."

Howard felt sheepish. "Well, I was really wondering if anybody felt sick. You know, had to get up and take medicine or something?"

"Not at all," said Ralph angrily.

Howard was sorry he had said anything. Whatever intimate ceremonies might take place at night in his neighbor's house were *not* his business. He said, "Maybe you ought to keep a dog. I was thinking, last night, he'd hear the softest burglar in the world. Trouble is, you take Miggs, he's all the time hearing things no man can *ever* hear. This can be upsetting, too."

"I am not," said Ralph furiously, "superstitious. And I don't intend to get that way."

Howard judged it best to change the subject.

He said to his wife that evening, "They're bugging me."

"Who are?"

"Next door. I don't know."

"What don't you know?"

"I don't know *anything*."

Howard stared at her somewhat hostilely, because he was feeling foolish. "I don't know what he meant by 'superstitious.' And



there's something else I can't get out of my head."

"So put it into mine," she invited.

"It bugs me that I saw a red stain of some kind on that quilt."

"What kind?" she said.

"Okay," he confessed. "You know the classics. Ever think of this? How do we know what *really* happened to Milly Sidwell?"

When Stella did not laugh it occurred to Howard, with a familiar surprise, that he loved her very much, darned if he didn't. She said in a minute, "I don't see how he could have buried Milly in his back yard without *Miggs* knowing all about it, do you?"

"That's right," said Howard, relaxing.

"Of course, in the cellar—" She raised an eyebrow at him.

"They've got no cellar," said Howard at once. All these little houses sat on concrete slabs. There were no cellars. Howard could think of nowhere to hide a body in *his* house, so he felt cheered.

"Anyhow, that's silly," Stella said indulgently, now that he was cheered. And then she added, "Ralph didn't *care* enough about Milly to murder her." She hoped he wouldn't want her to explain. She wasn't sure she could.

But Howard said, "I'll tell you what, Stell. Why don't we ask them over for a barbecue on Sunday? Out in the back yard? Real informal?"

"Why?" she asked calmly, trusting him to know that she was only wondering, not saying "No."

"Because," he answered, "they bug me."

"Me, too," said Stella in a minute.

Stella extended the invitation over the phone, coaxed a little, saying that it was right next door, just the four of them, no special trouble would be gone to, everything very informal, just wear any old clothes. Howard was very good with steaks on charcoal. Francine said she would ask Ralph.

On Wednesday morning, when Howard appeared, Ralph was backing out his revived vehicle. He stopped. "Say, Howard?"

"Yeah?"

"Listen, Francine would like to come over on Sunday. The only thing—"

"Yeah?"

"I'm wondering, could you lock up your dog?"

"What do you mean, lock him up?"

"Well, Francine, she's nervous about coming over. She's

afraid, I guess, of dogs."

"Well," said Howard, "Miggs isn't going to think much of the idea, but sure, he can stay in the house. You come along over, both of you."

So the invitation was accepted.

Sure enough, on Sunday, Miggs saw no reason to conceal his anguish at being incarcerated, while something interesting was going on behind the house. Howard and Stella did their best, carrying trays of food out to the redwood table, lighting the candles in their glass globes, offering drinks and tidbits, Howard fussing over his coals.

The guests didn't help. The meal was uncomfortable, speech stiff, dull, pumped up. No spark, as Stella had said before. Ralph was an unresponsive man, Howard decided. That was a good word for him. He seemed to be locked up inside himself. Lonely, you could say. As for Francine, she ate well.

When it was time for dessert, Howard went into the kitchen with a trayload of dirty dishes. Under full instructions he was trusted to return with a trayload of sweets, the ice cream and cake, while Stella poured the coffee and kept the lame talk limping along.

Howard stood over the sink,

rinsing off the plates while he was at it, with Miggs coiling and curling around his legs. Begging and apologizing. Whatever I did to offend you, forgive me? Please, I would so like to come to the party?

Howard felt bad about this. He couldn't explain, could he? Staring out into the deepening dusk he saw, across the two driveways, that wash of light in the upper story. He stepped nimbly to his own back door and called, "Oh, Ralph, could you come here a minute?"

When Ralph came in, to be greeted with delight by Miggs (in whose opinion things were looking up), Howard was standing quietly by the sink. "I just saw something funny in your house. Same as I saw before. Come and look."

The older man was the shorter. He came up beside Howard. His head, at Howard's shoulder, was held in tension. Nothing happened for a moment or two.

"Well, I guess," said Howard, "it's like your tooth won't ache at the dentist's."

Then the light happened again.

Miggs began to bark suddenly. "Listen, Miggs, shut up, will you?" shouted Howard. Ralph was pushing against the sink. But his mood was not what Howard expected. "You saw

something funny?" Ralph said firmly, when the dog was quiet. "You're not having hallucinations, are you? So whatever it was is real?"

"Whatever it is," said Howard cautiously.

But Ralph went rushing out the back door and Miggs tumbled after. Howard hurried to follow and saw the man jogging on the grass toward the candlelit picnic table with the dog bounding in pursuit.

Francine screamed in terror.

Howard swooped to catch the dog, and Stella began to soothe, and Ralph sat down.

When the noise and confusion had abated, Ralph said to his wife, "He just saw something funny. So now you tell *him* he's being haunted."

Francine began to cry. The oddest thing was that in the midst of her bawling she took up a piece of roll, buttered it, and stuffed it into her mouth.

"What's the matter?" cried Stella. "What did you see?"

"I don't know. Some car's headlight, maybe," said Ralph contemptuously; "but *she* says my house is haunted. She thinks we've got a ghost in there. Listen, I thought I heard something funny, a couple of times. But she didn't hear it, so she said that whatever is there must be hunting *me*. She said it must be Milly—Milly not

wanting another woman in her house."

"Oh, come on," said Stella. "Really!" She was shocked, not so much by the idea of the supernatural as by the husband's ruthless betrayal of his wife.

"Well, I don't know," Francine was sobbing. "I don't know. I don't know."

Howard said, "Why don't we take Miggs over there? I told you, dogs can sense things out of our range. If *he* says it's okay, you can relax."

"No," yelled Francine. She stood up. Her great bulk, in the growing darkness, was uncanny. "No," she screamed. "I won't have a dog in the house. No!"

Miggs, who knew somehow that he was being insulted, replied in kind. So Howard dragged him back to his kitchen prison. What the hell, he was saying to himself. The worst of it was, he couldn't help thinking it might *be* hell.

The party was now definitely over. Francine kept blubbering and Ralph Sidwell was in a rage. He seemed to be a man who cast out whatever anger he felt, to ripple off on all sides, fall where it may. He seemed to be angry with the Lamboys. So the Sidwells went home.

Howard, stubborn to be kind whether they liked it or not, walked with them to the front

sidewalk. Something made him say to them, "If you need any help, any time, just remember, will you? Here I am, right next door."

But they left without answering.

In the back yard Stella stood among the ruins. Howard went to let the dog out. Miggs raced around joyously for sixty seconds. He had been forgiven? That was fine with him. All was well.

But it wasn't.

The Lamboys ate dessert indoors. They didn't talk much. Stella could not be rid of the impression that somewhere beneath Francine's flesh there was a small, frail, and very frightened woman who had *not* been afraid of the dog. Stella was almost sure now that Francine hadn't wanted to come at all. But Ralph, unable to read the crooked signal of a false excuse, had fixed it so that she'd had to come. But what *was* she afraid of?

Howard kept wondering about the light, and what it had really been, and why Ralph had seemed, at first glad, and then angry, that somebody else had "seen something funny." What was Ralph afraid of?

Bedtime came and Howard let Miggs out briefly (no walk tonight), then checked the house and climbed upstairs. He

went into their daughter's room that was always waiting for her, silent, vacant, but in sweet order. It was on the side toward the Sidwells. He looked out. The house over there had a light on somewhere—on the other side, downstairs—but as far as he could tell, all was peaceful.

Howard gave the whole thing up and dropped into bed.

At one o'clock in the morning the Lamboys' front doorbell rang and kept ringing in the manner that says *panic*. Howard leaped up, put on his robe and slippers, ran his hand over his rumpled hair, and went steadily down the stairs. Miggs, naturally, was curious too, and Howard could not but feel glad that the dog came to press his weight against his master's leg.

The porchlight fell on the white face of Ralph Sidwell. He was fully dressed. He said, "I'm afraid."

"What seems to be the trouble?" asked Howard quietly.

"I heard her scream. I think she—I don't—I'm afraid to go and see."

"Where is she?"

"Upstairs. I— Well, we had a fight. I couldn't—I didn't want to go up to bed. Then I heard the scream. I don't know what to do."

"I'll come with you," said

Howard. "We'll take the dog. Let me get his leash."

Stella was halfway down the stairs and had heard. Howard snapped the leash on Miggs's collar. He took his flashlight thinking of it vaguely as a weapon. But the weapon he relied on was the dog.

Ralph Sidwell could hardly stand on his puny legs. "I don't know if I c-can." His jaw shook.

Stella said, "We'll follow, Howard. You go and see." She bent in womanly compassion to this trouble. Howard walked toward whatever the trouble was, over there.

Strange night. The street was quiet. The little boxes stood in rows among the softly sighing trees, and how many civilizations—the insects, the little creeping creatures, the birds, the dogs and cats, and what others unknown—were coexisting all around the little boxes?

Howard went around the walks and up to his neighbor's box, the door of which stood wide open. He entered cautiously. The dog, keeping close, was silent.

He called out, "Francine? Francine?"

There was no answer. The lights were on in the living room to his right. The room was empty. The rest of the downstairs seemed dark and quiet. Howard led the dog

toward other doors. He knew the floor plan. But Miggs made no sound.

So Howard started up the stairs. The dog, seeming nervous now, crowded him toward the railing. The upper-hall light switch was in a familiar place. Howard flicked it on and saw a pale blue mound on the floor.

Francine seemed neither conscious nor unconscious. She moaned but did not speak. She was bleeding from a scalp wound.

The ladder to the attic, that hinged from the hall ceiling, was down, and the square hole in the attic floor gaped open. Darkness lay beyond it. Howard's neck hair stirred. He didn't want to climb that ladder and turn his flashlight into that darkness. Wiser to check elsewhere first?

Now Miggs began to growl. Howard turned nervously and heard Stella's voice below. So he called down, "She's been hurt," keeping his voice not too loud, because more ears might be listening than he knew. "Not too badly, I think. Don't come up yet."

"Shall I call a doctor?" said his wife's clear voice.

"Good idea. Or else—no, wait."

Miggs was still growling and doing a kind of dance, advance and retreat, advance and re-

treat. "In here, eh?" said Howard to the dog. He pushed on the door of the back upstairs room that, in his house, was Stella's sewing room. It was a bedroom here.

Howard whipped the beam of his flashlight around the four walls. Nothing. No one. There was no clothes closet, so nobody could be hiding behind another door. Behind the door he'd come through? Howard shoved it flat against the wall. Nothing.

It was Miggs who saved his reason. (He said so later.)

Howard walked into the small room that seemed so empty. The dog went with him. But the dog *knew*. And the dog rushed and skittered, advanced and retreated, and his knowing muzzle, questing, knew *where*. So that when a hand of thin bone came out from under the bedspread's fringe and took Howard by the bare ankle, Howard did *not* fly up to the ceiling or out of his wits.

Oh, he jumped. But Miggs went at once into an uproar. So Howard, sheltered by the noise, dared to crouch and send light under the bed and into a face—a face the like of which he had never seen before.

"Guard. Stay," he said to Miggs, kindly but firmly. "Good boy. On guard."

He went into the hall.

Francine, huge in her pale blue robe, had lifted herself on one arm; her other hand was on her bloody forehead. "Lester?" she said, in a childish piping.

Howard called down the stairs to Stella. "Call the police, hon. That's quickest." Then he looked at Francine.

"My baby? My boy?" said Francine, making everything a question, as if she were sure of nothing. "Never right? Nobody knew? Hungry? Ladder? Hit me?" Her bulk seemed to shake and then flow back down to the floor.

Stella was already on the phone. At the bottom of the stairs Ralph Sidwell was staring up at his neighbor.

"We have a problem here," said Howard quietly. "You've had a kind of stowaway, I think."

He went back to where Miggs was. The dog backed off, obeying. Slowly Howard persuaded the creature out from under the bed. A boy? Anywhere from fourteen to twenty-four. Who could say? He was deformed and stunted, wire-thin, incredibly pale, almost witless. He did not know how to stand up. He clung to the floor like a spider.

People came...

It was 3:30 in the morning when the Lamboys returned home at last. Stella said it was

unthinkable to go to bed without breakfast and set to work creating homely scents of coffee and bacon.

Howard sat down on the dinette bench and Miggs jumped enthusiastically beside him. This was forbidden, but Howard was in no mood to scold.

"How did she ever sneak the Thing into the attic?" he said, because he was too filled with horror and pity to mention feelings: the brain was safer. "That's where the pillow was. She made a mistake about the quilt, eh? What do you know about that candle! Dangerous, whew! That alone!" (Alone, he thought, a living thing, ever alone, alone.) "She'd have to bring its food by night, on Sundays. But last night Ralph wouldn't go to bed. The ladder hit her."

Stella said sternly, "Her shame. So hide it and everything is dandy. And when the money is running out, go after some ordinary lonely man."

"What did he want? Home cooking?" said Howard as sternly as she. "How come he

didn't notice this woman was sick and off the beam—way off, and so desperate. If it wasn't in his mind to pay any attention or to help her—"

In a moment Stella sat down and said, "If you're off, so far, and always getting farther, you'd have to have some little tiny pleasure. Something sweet in your mouth, at least?" She held her cheeks. They were feeling hollow.

Howard was thinking: In how many little boxes are there people, locked up, all alone, and in how many different ways? And how should we know? And what could we do? And why should that be?

Miggs was licking his master's left ear. We love. We love? And here we are together. So all is well. All is well?

Howard put his arm around the meat of Miggs, his warm loving creature who gave his heart in trust, even unto another species. "Miggs," he said, "what happens to people shouldn't happen to a dog." And he snuggled into the live fur.

"Q"

# Patricia Highsmith

## The Empty Birdhouse

*Yes, in some indefinable way, we think there is an affinity between Charlotte Armstrong's "The Light Next Door" and Patricia Highsmith's "The Empty Birdhouse." But while somewhere in the obscure creative origins of both stories there is a basic idea in common, a conceptual sameness, you will now discover one reason why the two stories turned out to be so completely different. In Charlotte Armstrong's story, as you now know, the Thing is not revealed until the end; but in Patricia Highsmith's story the Thing is revealed at the beginning. Both approaches are valid, and both produce frissons d'horreur that will remain in your memory.*

*And both stories have something else in common. A trick of the eye. A trick of the mind. And these tricks—do they expose or conceal the "many civilizations—the insects, the little creeping creatures, the birds, the dogs and cats, and what others unknown—coexisting all around the little boxes" we call houses (quoted from Charlotte Armstrong's story)? These tricks of the eye and the mind—do they expose or conceal "the dark and frightening gorge of the past," the guilts, the crimes (quoted from Patricia Highsmith's story)? These tricks of the eye and the mind—reader, beware. . .*

**T**he first time Edith saw it she laughed, not believing her eyes.

She stepped to one side and looked again; it was still there, but a bit dimmer. A squirrel-like face—but demonic in its intensity—looked out at her from the round hole in the birdhouse. An illusion, of course, something to do with

shadows, or a knot in the wood of the back wall of the birdhouse. The sunlight fell plain on the six-by-nine-inch birdhouse in the corner made by the toolshed and the brick wall of the garden. Edith went closer, until she was ten feet away. The face disappeared.

That was funny, she thought as she went back into the



cottage. She would have to tell Charles tonight.

But she forgot to tell Charles.

Three days later she saw the face again. This time she was straightening up after having set two empty milk bottles on the back doorstep. A pair of beady black eyes looked out at her, straight and level, from the birdhouse, and they appeared to be surrounded by brownish fur. Edith flinched, then stood rigid. She thought she saw two rounded ears, a mouth that was neither animal nor bird, simply grim and cruel.

But she knew that the birdhouse was empty. The bluetit family had flown away weeks ago, and it had been a narrow squeak for the baby bluetits as the Masons' cat next door had been interested; the cat could reach the hole from the toolshed roof with a paw, and Charles had made the hole a trifle too big for bluetits. But Edith and Charles had staved Jonathan off until the birds were well away. Afterward, days later, Charles had taken the birdhouse down—it hung like a picture on a wire from a nail—and shaken it to make sure no debris was inside. Bluetits might nest a second time, he said. But they hadn't as yet—Edith was sure because she had kept watching.

And squirrels never nested in birdhouses. Or did they? At any rate, there were no squirrels around. Rats? They would never choose a birdhouse for a home. How could they get in, anyway, without flying?

While these thoughts went through Edith's mind, she stared at the intense brown face, and the piercing black eyes stared back at her.

I'll simply go and see what it is, Edith thought, and stepped onto the path that led to the toolshed. But she went only three paces and stopped. She didn't want to touch the birdhouse and get bitten—maybe by a dirty rodent's tooth. She'd tell Charles tonight. But now that she was closer, the thing was still there, clearer than ever. It wasn't an optical illusion.

Her husband Charles Beaufort, a computing engineer, worked at a plant eight miles from where they lived. He frowned slightly and smiled when Edith told him what she had seen. "Really?" he said.

"I *may* be wrong. I wish you'd shake the thing again and see if there's anything in it," Edith said, smiling herself now, though her tone was earnest.

"All right, I will," Charles said quickly, then began to talk of something else. They were then in the middle of dinner.

Edith had to remind him when they were putting the dishes into the washing machine. She wanted him to look before it became dark. So Charles went out, and Edith stood on the doorstep, watching. Charles tapped on the birdhouse, listened with one ear cocked. He took the birdhouse down from the nail, shook it, then slowly tipped it so the hole was on the bottom. He shook it again.

"Absolutely nothing," he called to Edith, "Not even a piece of straw." He smiled broadly at his wife and hung the birdhouse back on the nail. "I wonder what you could've seen? You hadn't had a couple of Scotches, had you?"

"No. I described it to you." Edith felt suddenly blank, deprived of something. "It had a head a little larger than a squirrel's, beady black eyes, and a sort of serious mouth."

"Serious mouth!" Charles put his head back and laughed as he came back into the house.

"A tense mouth. It had a grim look," Edith said positively.

But she said nothing else about it. They sat in the living room, Charles looking over the newspaper, then opening his folder of reports from the office. Edith had a catalogue and was trying to choose a tile

pattern for the kitchen wall. Blue and white, or pink and white and blue? She was not in a mood to decide, and Charles was never a help, always saying agreeably, "Whatever you like is all right with me."

Edith was 34. She and Charles had been married seven years. In the second year of their marriage Edith had lost the child she was carrying. She had lost it rather deliberately, being in a panic about giving birth. That was to say, her fall down the stairs had been rather on purpose, if she were willing to admit it, but the miscarriage had been put down as the result of an accident. She had never tried to have another child, and she and Charles had never even discussed it.

She considered herself and Charles a happy couple. Charles was doing well with Pan-Com Instruments, and they had more money and more freedom than several of their neighbors who were tied down with two or more children. They both liked entertaining, Edith in their house especially, and Charles on their boat, a thirty-foot motor launch which slept four. They plied the local river and inland canals on most week-ends when the weather was good. Edith could cook almost as well afloat as on shore, and Charles obliged with drinks, fishing equipment,

and the record player. He would also dance a hornpipe on request.

During the week-end that followed—not a boating week-end because Charles had extra work—Edith glanced several times at the empty birdhouse, reassured now because she *knew* there was nothing in it. When the sunlight shone on it she saw nothing but a paler brown in the round hole, the back of the birdhouse; and when in shadow the hole looked black.

On Monday afternoon, as she was changing the bedsheets in time for the laundryman who came at three, she saw something slip from under a blanket that she picked up from the floor. Something ran across the floor and out the door—something brown and larger than a squirrel. Edith gasped and dropped the blanket. She tiptoed to the bedroom door, looked into the hall and on the stairs, the first five steps of which she could see.

What kind of animal made no noise at all, even on bare wooden stairs? Or had she really seen anything? But she was sure she had. She'd even had a glimpse of the small black eyes. It was the same animal she had seen looking out of the birdhouse.

The only thing to do was to

find it, she told herself. She thought at once of the hammer as a weapon in case of need, but the hammer was downstairs. She took a heavy book instead and went cautiously down the stairs, alert and looking everywhere as her vision widened at the foot of the stairs.

There was nothing in sight in the living room. But it could be under the sofa or the armchair. She went into the kitchen and got the hammer from a drawer. Then she returned to the living room and shoved the armchair quickly some three feet. Nothing. She found she was afraid to bend down to look under the sofa, whose cover came almost to the floor, but she pushed it a few inches and listened.

It *might* have been a trick of her eyes, she supposed. Something like a spot floating before the eyes, after bending over the bed. She decided not to say anything to Charles about it. Yet in a way, what she had seen in the bedroom had been more definite than what she had seen in the birdhouse.

A baby yuma, she thought an hour later as she was sprinkling flour on a joint in the kitchen. A yuma. Now, where had that come from? Did such an animal exist? Had she seen a photograph of one in a magazine, or read the word somewhere?

Edith made herself finish all she intended to do in the kitchen, then went to the big dictionary and looked up the word yuma. It was not in the dictionary. A trick of her mind, she thought. Just as the animal was probably a trick of her eyes. But it was strange how they went together, as if the name were absolutely correct for the animal.

Two days later, as she and Charles were carrying their coffee cups into the kitchen, Edith saw it dart from under the refrigerator—or from behind the refrigerator—diagonally across the kitchen threshold and into the dining room. She almost dropped her cup and saucer, but caught them, and they chattered in her hands.

"What's the matter?" Charles asked.

"I saw it again!" Edith said. "The animal."

"What?"

"I didn't tell you," she began with a suddenly dry throat, as if she was making a painful confession. "I think I saw that thing—the thing that was in the birdhouse—upstairs in the bedroom on Monday. And I think I saw it again. Just now."

"Edith, my darling, there wasn't anything in the birdhouse."

"Not when you looked. But

this animal moves quickly. It almost flies."

Charles's face grew more concerned. He looked where she was looking, at the kitchen threshold. "You saw it just now? I'll go look," he said, and walked into the dining room.

He gazed around on the floor, glanced at his wife, then rather casually bent and looked under the table, among the chair legs. "Really, Edith—"

"Look in the living room," Edith said.

Charles did, for perhaps fifteen seconds, then he came back, smiling a little. "Sorry to say this, old girl, but I think you're seeing things. Unless, of course, it was a mouse. We might have mice. I hope not."

"Oh, it's much bigger. And it's brown. Mice are gray."

"Yep," Charles said vaguely, "Well, don't worry, dear, it's not going to attack you. It's running." He added in a voice quite devoid of conviction, "If necessary, we'll get an exterminator."

"Yes," she said at once.

"How big is it?"

She held her hands apart at a distance of about sixteen inches. "This big."

"Sounds like it might be a ferret," he said.

"It's even quicker. And it has black eyes. Just now it stopped just for an instant and

looked straight at me: Honestly, Charles." Her voice had begun to shake. She pointed to the spot by the refrigerator, "Just there it stopped for a split second and—"

"Edith, get a grip on yourself." He pressed her arm.

"It looks so evil. I can't tell you."

Charles was silent, looking at her.

"Is there any animal called a yuma?" she asked.

"A yuma? I've never heard of it. Why?"

"Because the name came to me today out of nowhere. I thought—because I'd thought of it and I'd never seen an animal like this that maybe I'd seen it somewhere."

"Y-u-m-a?"

Edith nodded.

Charles, smiling again because it was turning into a funny game, went to the dictionary as Edith had done and looked for the word. He closed the dictionary and went to the Encyclopaedia Britannica on the bottom shelves of the bookcase. After a minute's search he said to Edith, "Not in the dictionary and not in the Britannica either. I think it's a word you made up." And he laughed. "Or maybe it's a word in *Alice in Wonderland*."

It's a real word, Edith thought, but she didn't have the

courage to say so. Charles would deny it.

Edith felt done in and went to bed around ten with her book. But she was still reading when Charles came in just before eleven. At that moment both of them saw it: it flashed from the foot of the bed across the carpet, in plain view of Edith and Charles, went under the chest of drawers and, Edith thought, out the door. Charles must have thought so, too, as he turned quickly to look into the hall.

"You saw it!" Edith said.

Charles's face was stiff. He turned the light on in the hall, looked, then went down the stairs.

He was gone perhaps three minutes, and Edith heard him pushing furniture about. Then he came back.

"Yes, I saw it." His face looked suddenly pale and tired.

But Edith sighed and almost smiled, glad that he finally believed her. "You see what I mean now. I wasn't seeing things."

"No," Charles agreed.

Edith was sitting up in bed. "The awful thing is, it looks uncatchable."

Charles began to unbutton his shirt. "Uncatchable. What a word. Nothing's uncatchable. Maybe it's a ferret. Or a squirrel."

"Couldn't you tell? It went right by you."

"Well!" He laughed. "It was pretty fast. You've seen it two or three times and you can't tell what it is."

"Did it have a tail? I can't tell if it had or if that's the whole body—that length."

Charles kept silent. He reached for his dressing gown, slowly put it on. "I think it's smaller than it looks. It is fast, so it seems elongated. Might be a squirrel."

"The eyes are in the front of its head. Squirrels' eyes are sort of at the side."

Charles stooped at the foot of the bed and looked under it. He ran his hand over the tucked foot of the bed, underneath. Then he stood up. "Look, if we see it again—if we saw it—"

"What do you mean if? You did see it—you said so."

"I *think* so." Charles laughed. "How do I know my eyes or my mind isn't playing a trick on me? Your description was so eloquent." He sounded almost angry with her.

"Well—if?"

"If we see it again, we'll borrow a cat. A cat'll find it."

"Not the Masons' cat. I'd hate to ask them."

They had had to throw pebbles at the Masons' cat to keep it away when the bluetits were starting to fly. The Masons

hadn't liked that. They were still on good terms with the Masons, but neither Edith nor Charles would have dreamed of asking to borrow Jonathan.

"We could call in an exterminator," Edith said.

"Ha! And what'll we ask him to look for?"

"What we saw," Edith said, annoyed because it was Charles who had suggested an exterminator just a couple of hours before. She was interested in the conversation, vitally interested, yet it depressed her. She felt it was vague and hopeless, and she wanted to lose herself in sleep.

"Let's try a cat," Charles said. "You know, Farrow has a cat. He got it from the people next door to him. You know, Farrow the accountant who lives on Shanley Road? He took the cat over when the people next door moved. But his wife doesn't like cats, he says. This one—"

"I'm not mad about cats either," Edith said. "We don't want to acquire a cat."

"No. All right. But I'm sure we could borrow this one, and the reason I thought of it is that Farrow says the cat's a marvelous hunter. It's a female nine years old, he says."

Charles came home with the cat the next evening, thirty minutes later than usual,

because he had gone home with Farrow to fetch it. He and Edith closed the doors and the windows, then let the cat out of its basket in the living room. The cat was white with gray brindle markings, and a black tail. She stood stiffly, looking all around her with a glum and somewhat disapproving air.

"Ther-re, Puss-Puss," Charles said, stooping but not touching her. "You're only going to be here a day or two. Have we got some milk, Edith? Or better yet, cream."

They made a bed for the cat out of a carton, put an old towel in it, then placed it in a corner of the living room, but the cat preferred the end of the sofa. She had explored the house perfunctorily and had shown no interest in the cupboards or closets, though Edith and Charles had hoped she would. Edith said she thought the cat was too old to be of much use in catching anything.

The next morning Mrs. Farrow rang up Edith and told her that they could keep Puss-Puss if they wanted to. "She's a clean cat and very healthy. I just don't happen to like cats. So if you take to her—or she takes to you—"

Edith wriggled out by an unusually fluent burst of thanks and explanations of why they

had borrowed the cat, and she promised to ring Mrs. Farrow in a couple of days. Edith said she thought they had mice, but were not sure enough to call in an exterminator. This verbal effort exhausted her.

The cat spent most of her time sleeping either at the end of the sofa or on the foot of the bed upstairs, which Edith didn't care for but endured rather than alienate the cat. She even spoke affectionately to the cat and carried her to the open doors of closets, but Puss-Puss always stiffened slightly, not with fear but with boredom, and immediately turned away. Meanwhile she ate well of tuna, which the Farrows had prescribed.

Edith was polishing silver at the kitchen table on Friday afternoon when she saw the thing run straight beside her on the floor—from behind her, out the kitchen door into the dining room like a brown rocket. And she saw it turn to the right into the living room where the cat lay asleep.

Edith stood up at once and went to the living-room door. No sign of it now, and the cat's head still rested on her paws. The cat's eyes were closed. Edith's heart was beating fast. Her fear mingled with impatience and for an instant she experienced a sense of chaos



and terrible disorder. The animal was in the room! And the cat was of no use at all! And the Wilsons were coming to dinner at seven o'clock. And she'd hardly have time to speak to Charles about it because he'd be washing and changing, and she couldn't, wouldn't mention it in front of the Wilsons, though they knew the Wilsons quite well. As Edith's chaos became frustration, tears burned her eyes. She imagined herself jumpy and awkward all evening, dropping things, and unable to say what was wrong.

"The yuma. The damned yuma!" she said softly and bitterly, then went back to the silver and doggedly finished polishing it and set the table.

The dinner, however, went quite well, and nothing was dropped or burned. Christopher Wilson and his wife Frances lived on the other side of the village, and had two boys, seven and five. Christopher was a lawyer for Pan-Com.

"You're looking a little peaked, Charles," Christopher said. "How about you and Edith joining us on Sunday?" He glanced at his wife. "We're going for a swim at Hadden and then for a picnic. Just us and the kids. Lots of fresh air."

"Oh—" Charles waited for Edith to decline, but she was silent. "Thanks very much. As

for me—well, we'd thought of taking the boat somewhere. But we've borrowed a cat, and I don't think we should leave her alone all day."

"A cat?" asked Frances Wilson. "Borrowed it?"

"Yes. We thought we might have mice and wanted to find out," Edith put in with a smile.

Frances asked a question or two about the cat and the subject was dropped. Puss-Puss at the moment was upstairs, Edith thought. She always went upstairs when a new person came into the house.

Later when the Wilsons had left, Edith told Charles about seeing the animal again in the kitchen, and about the unconcern of Puss-Puss.

"That's the trouble. It doesn't make any noise," Charles said. Then he frowned. "Are you sure you saw it?"

"Just as sure as I am that I ever saw it," Edith said.

"Let's give the cat a couple of more days," Charles said.

The next morning, Saturday, Edith came downstairs around nine to start breakfast and stopped short at what she saw on the living-room floor. It was the yuma, dead, mangled at head and tail and abdomen. In fact, the tail was chewed off except for a damp stub about two inches long. And as for the head there was none. But the



fur was brown; almost black where it was damp with blood.

Edith turned and ran up the stairs.

"Charles!"

He was awake, but sleepy. "What?"

"The cat caught it. It's in the living room. Come down, will you?—I can't face it, I really can't."

"Certainly, dear," Charles said, throwing off the covers.

He was downstairs a few seconds later. Edith followed him.

"Um. Pretty big," he said.

"What is it?"

"I dunno. I'll get the dustpan." He went into the kitchen.

Edith hovered, watching him push it onto the dustpan with a rolled newspaper. He peered at the gore, a chewed windpipe, bones. The feet had little claws.

"What is it? A ferret?" Edith asked.

"I dunno. I really don't." Charles wrapped the thing quickly in a newspaper. "I'll get rid of it in the ashcan. Monday's garbage day, isn't it?"

Edith didn't answer.

Charles went through the kitchen and she heard the lid of the ashcan rattle outside the kitchen door.

"Where's the cat?" she asked when he came in again.

He was washing his hands at

the kitchen sink. "I don't know." He got the floor mop and brought it into the living room. He scrubbed the spot where the animal had lain. "Not much blood. I don't see any here, in fact."

While they were having breakfast, the cat came in through the front door, which Edith had opened to air the living room—although she had not noticed any smell. The cat looked at them in a tired way, barely raised her head, and said, "Mi-o-ow," the first sound she had uttered since her arrival.

"Good pussy!" Charles said with enthusiasm. "Good Puss-Puss!"

But the cat ducked from under his congratulatory hand that would have stroked her back and went on slowly into the kitchen for her breakfast of tuna.

Charles glanced at Edith with a smile which she tried to return. She had barely finished her egg, but could not eat a bite more of her toast.

She took the car and did her shopping in a fog, greeting familiar faces as she always did, yet she felt no contact between herself and other people. When she came home, Charles was lying on the bed, fully dressed, his hands behind his head.

"I wondered where you were," Edith said.

"I felt drowsy. Sorry." He sat up.

"Don't be sorry. If you want a nap, take one."

"I was going to get the cobwebs out of the garage and give it a good sweeping." He got to his feet. "But aren't you glad it's gone, dear—whatever it was?" he asked, forcing a laugh.

"Of course. Yes, God knows." But she still felt depressed, and she sensed that Charlie did, too. She stood hesitantly in the doorway. "I just wonder what it was." If we'd only see the head, she thought, but couldn't say it. Wouldn't the head turn up, inside or outside the house? The cat couldn't have eaten the skull.

"Something like a ferret," Charles said. "We can give the cat back now, if you like."

But they decided to wait till tomorrow to ring the Farrows.

Now Puss-Puss seemed to smile when Edith looked at her. It was a weary smile, or was the weariness only in the eyes? After all, the cat was nine. Edith glanced at the cat many times as she went about her chores that week-end. The cat had a different air, as if she had done her duty and knew it, but took no particular pride in it.

In a curious way Edith felt that the cat was in alliance with the yuma, or whatever animal it

had been—was or had been in alliance. They were both animals and had understood each other, one the enemy and stronger, the other the prey. And the cat had been able to see it, perhaps hear it too, and had been able to get her claws into it. Above all, the cat was not afraid as she was, and even Charles was, Edith felt. At the same time she was thinking this, Edith realized that she disliked the cat. It had a gloomy, secretive look. The cat didn't really like them, either.

Edith had intended to phone the Farrows around three on Sunday afternoon, but Charles went to the telephone himself and told Edith he was going to call them. Edith dreaded hearing even Charles's part of the conversation, but she sat on with the Sunday papers on the sofa, listening.

Charles thanked them profusely and said the cat had caught something like a large squirrel or a ferret. But they really didn't want to keep the cat, nice as she was, and could they bring her over, say around six? "But—well, the job's done, you see, and we're awfully grateful. I'll definitely ask at the plant if there's anyone who'd like a nice cat."

Charles loosened his collar after he put the telephone down. "Whew! That was

tough—I felt like a heel! But after all, there's no use saying we want the cat when we don't. Is there?"

"Certainly not. But we ought to take them a bottle of wine or something, don't you think?"

"Oh, definitely. What a good idea! Have we got any?"

They hadn't any. There was nothing in the way of unopened drink but a bottle of whiskey, which Edith proposed cheerfully.

"They did do us a big favor," Edith said.

Charles smiled. "That they did!" He wrapped the bottle in one of the green tissues in which their liquor store delivered bottles and set out with Puss-Puss in her basket.

Edith had said she did not care to go, but to be sure to give her thanks to the Farrows. Then Edith sat down on the sofa and tried to read the newspapers, but found her thoughts wandering. She looked around the empty, silent room, looked at the foot of the stairs and through the dining-room door.

It was gone now, the yuma baby. Why she thought it was a baby, she didn't know. A baby *what*? But she had always thought of it as young—and at the same time as cruel, and knowing about all the cruelty

and evil in the world, the animal world and the human world. And its neck had been severed by a cat. They had not found the head.

She was still sitting on the sofa when Charles came back.

He came into the living room with a slow step and slumped into the armchair. "Well—they didn't exactly want to take her back."

"What do you mean?"

"It isn't their cat, you know. They only took her on out of kindness—or something—when the people next door left. They were going to Australia and couldn't take the cat with them. The cat sort of hangs around the two houses there, but the Farrows feed her. It's sad."

Edith shook her head involuntarily. "I really didn't like the cat. It's too old for a new home, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. Well, at least she isn't going to starve with the Farrows. Can we have a cup of tea, do you think? I'd rather have that than a drink."

And Charles went to bed early, after rubbing his right shoulder with liniment. Edith knew he was afraid of his bursitis or rheumatism starting.

"I'm getting old," Charles said to her. "Anyway, I feel old tonight."

So did Edith. She also felt

melancholy. Standing at the bathroom mirror, she thought the little lines under her eyes looked deeper. The day had been a strain, for a Sunday. But the horror was out of the house. That was something. She had lived under it for nearly a fortnight.

Now that the yuma was dead, she realized what the trouble had been, or she could now admit it. The yuma had opened up the past, and it had been like a dark and frightening gorge. It had brought back the time when she had lost her child—on purpose—and it had recalled Charles's bitter chagrin then, his pretended indifference later. It had brought back her guilt. And she wondered if the animal had done the same thing to Charles? He hadn't been entirely noble in his early days at Pan-Com. He had told the truth about a man to a superior, the man had been dismissed—Charles had got his job—and the man had later committed suicide. Simpson. Charles had shrugged at the time. But had the yuma reminded him of Simpson? No person, no adult in the world, had a perfectly honorable past, a past without some crime in it. . . .

Less than a week later, Charles was watering the roses one evening when he saw an animal's face in the hole of the

birdhouse. It was the same face as the other animal's, or the face Edith had described to him, though he had never had such a good look at it as this.

There were the bright, fixed black eyes, the grim little mouth, the terrible alertness of which Edith had told him. The hose, forgotten in his hands, shot water straight out against the brick wall. He dropped the hose, and turned toward the house to cut the water off, intending to take the birdhouse down at once and see what was in it; but, he thought at the same time, the birdhouse wasn't big enough to hold such an animal as Puss-Puss had caught. That was certain.

Charles was almost at the house, running, when he saw Edith standing in the doorway.

She was looking at the birdhouse. "There it is *again*!"

"Yes." Charles turned off the water. "This time I'll see what it is."

He started for the birdhouse at a trot, but midway he stopped, staring toward the gate.

Through the open iron gate came Puss-Puss, looking bedraggled and exhausted, even apologetic. She had been walking, but now she trotted in an elderly way toward Charles, her head hanging.

"She's back," Charles said.

A fearful gloom settled on Edith. It was all so ordained, so terribly predictable. There would be more and more yumas. When Charles shook the birdhouse in a moment, there wouldn't be anything in it, and then she would see the animal in the house, and Puss-Puss

would again catch it. She and Charles, together, were stuck with it.

"She found her way all the way back here, I'm sure. Two miles," Charles said to Edith, smiling.

But Edith clamped her teeth to repress a scream.



# Kelley Roos

## The "Watch Out!" Girls (Final Performance)

Watch out for the "Watch Out!" girls—the gorgeous, glamorous chorus girls of the famous Broadway musical . . .

Once a year Bobo Wilton, the perennial bachelor playboy, threw a weekend party for the "Watch Out!" girls in his modernized Spanish mission high on a mountain in New Mexico—and what an annual ball that was! And this year Jeff Troy, professional photographer, and his lovely wife Haila, attended the fabulous show-girl reunion.

The "Watch Out!" girls were still charming and beautiful—visions of genuine pulchritude. But who would dream they would have to watch out for—murder.

This is one of three short novels, complete in this anthology.

### Detectives: JEFF and HAILA TROY

1937

Our lady chauffeur turned the sleek, luxurious station wagon onto Highway 66 and aimed it at the Sandia Mountains. In a few minutes we were out of the flat that the Rio Grande had leveled off for the use of the citizens of Albuquerque. We were on our way to become the week-end guests of certainly the most enthusiastic host in all the Southwest. His name was Bartlett Wilton. Jeff and I had never met him.

On our return trip from a

vacation in California, Jeff had dragged me off the train at Albuquerque. He had wanted to photograph a picture story of the Ernie Pyle Library, the small white house with the picket fence that Ernie and his wife had, for such a tragically brief time, called home. That job done, we were having a drink at our hotel bar when we saw Joyce Revere, the great big beautiful movie star, parade spectacularly through the lobby. Jeff had asked the

bartender what Miss Revere was up to in these parts and the bartender told him in full.

The gorgeous and glamorous Joyce was in Albuquerque today because twelve years ago she had been a show girl in the Broadway musical, *Watch Out!* Its principal backer was a wealthy, stage-struck gentleman named Bartlett Wilton. When Mr. Wilton had fallen collectively in love with the show's line of comely young ladies, no one had blamed him. They had been something, those girls, something to make two out of every three college boys within a hundred-mile radius of New York unfaithful to his Alma Mater, and something to make the boys' grandfathers forget the Floradora Sextet. The *Watch Out!* girls were now a theatrical legend, and Bartlett Wilton was a part of that legend.

Soon after the show's closing, Mr. Wilton had been laid low with an asthmatic condition that made it necessary for him to live every moment in the hot, dry air of New Mexico. Still a bachelor, he had built himself a fabulous house high in the Manzano Mountains. He could never return to the theatrical excitement of New York, but once a year he brought a little of that excitement to him. Once a year

he threw a week-end reunion party for the *Watch Out!* girls. They were older now, not the fresh young things they once had been, but to Bartlett Wilton they represented the high noon of his existence.

Almost before the bartender had finished his story Jeff was on the telephone, talking to Mr. Bartlett Wilton. Mr. Wilton was more than pleased with Jeff's idea that he do a camera story of this year's reunion; he was delighted. A car, he said, would be sent for us early the next afternoon.

Miss Marion Briggs pulled the station wagon into a right turn and we were no longer on Route 66. Jeff made a geographical inquiry, and we were both surprised that he received so complete an answer. Miss Briggs wasn't much of a talker.

"This is Cedro Canyon Road," she said. "We're heading south. Fifty miles to go."

"Are you related to Mr. Wilton?" Jeff asked.

Miss Briggs smiled, and for a moment her plain, heavy face lost its masklike quality and came alive. She seemed to have the reticence of a woman who was afraid of being made fun of, as if long ago cruel schoolmates had taunted her about her size and she lived in dread of being jeered at again.

She was not quite as tall as Jeff, I had noticed, but she seemed larger. She was stout, but not in the usual jolly, round way. There was something unnatural about her. It was probably the unexpectedness of her sober, retiring nature, which you don't associate with big people.

"No," she said, "I'm not a relative. Mr. Wilton calls me his assistant. I'm his secretary, his housekeeper, his chauffeur. Sometimes he calls me his majorette-domo."

"Mr. Wilton," Jeff said, "sounds fond of you."

"We get along very well," Miss Briggs said. "But Mr. Wilton likes everybody."

"Especially," Jeff said, "his old *Watch Out!* girls. How many of them turned up this year for the party?"

"Five," Miss Briggs said. She turned her face back toward the road.

Jeff didn't propel the conversation any farther. He sat mutely beside me, a drooling grin on his face. I knew it wasn't the wild drama of the Western scenery, or the thought of all the gin those juniper trees would make that inspired his fervor. He was thinking of a houseful of mellow-ripe show girls. These ladies would be in their late twenties or early thirties now—in their prime.

I was beginning not to enjoy

our vacation so much, and I wondered how our driver felt about her boss's annual jamboree.

You could see that Miss Briggs was not indifferent to her appearance. She had lately been to a beauty parlor, but it must have been the wrong one. She had attempted to become a blonde; she had succeeded only in making her hair a faded mouse-brown. She wore bangs that were creeping too close to her thick-rimmed glasses. It was as if she had made a sudden try for beauty, then abandoned the effort. I wondered if being surrounded for a week-end by such a display of pulchritude would make her unhappy.

We had passed a forest-ranger station, a few small adobe settlements. Now there was nothing near the winding, climbing road except what nature had put there—rugged, angry rock, the lonely, huddling aspen, and spruce and pine. Far away one of the Southwest's quick, sudden storms turned a mountain peak into an island of shadow in the ocean of dazzling sunshine. I could see the lightning dart from the clouds, but there was no sound of thunder.

Abruptly Miss Briggs jerked the car off the paved highway and we jounced up the bumpy floor of a canyon.



Jeff said, "Is this a road?"

She nodded without smiling. "An old wagon trail. We're almost there now."

A moment later we nosed around a great overhanging boulder. I held my breath. The nice boulder didn't fall on us. Then I let my breath out in a gasp. I was looking down across Mr. Bartlett Wilton's palace and at the mountain view behind it.

"We won't be able to tell our friends about this," Jeff said sadly. "It defies description."

Miss Briggs said quietly, "I should like to stay here the rest of my life."

"And the house!" I said. "How could a miracle like that happen?"

"The part near us is an old Spanish mission," Miss Briggs said. "Mr. Wilton built the modern wing."

When Marion Briggs used the word *modern*, she meant it. With its walls of plate glass and its brilliantly colored deck-roofs, the house was a shining jewel. There were lawns and gardens, a tennis court and a putting green; as we slipped down below the roof level of the mission, I caught the blue gleam of water in a swimming pool.

Then we were coasting through an arch in the mission wall, into a balcony-studded patio. Jeff unloaded our lug-

gage, and we followed Miss Briggs through what might once have been the dining hall of the Spanish friars. Then, in one step, we found ourselves in another world. I felt like Buck Rogers' friend, Wilma, as we were led across a circular, up-to-the-minute modern hall and into a tremendous living room.

I stopped dead and gaped; I blinked my eyes and looked again. It was true. There was a swimming pool in Bartlett Wilton's living room! At least, there was a part of a swimming pool. The rest of the crescent-shaped pond extended beyond the raised wall of glass into the garden outside.

On an upholstered divan, before an acre of ebony-black coffee table, as if in dry dock, sat a pair of ravishing non-bathing beauties. One was a brunette, still girlish, with a sweetness about her that made the daring of her bathing suit seem just a little shocking. The other was an ash-blonde, and there was nothing girlish about her. She was smooth, she was svelte, she was the sophisticated lady, and, at the moment, she was having something to say.

"Zita, dear," she was drawling, "don't you think you ought to skip this one?"

Across the pool, in the center of an oval bar, another

blonde was mixing herself a drink. This was not a Park Avenue blonde; she was quite a way west of Park and seemed to be moving toward Eighth. Right now I'd have put her at Broadway. She was still gorgeous, but the strain of staying that way had begun to tell. There was too much make-up on her face, too much brassy gold in her hair; her figure was a bit too lush. Her carmine-full lips parted in a twisted smile. Then she saw us and she left the critic of her drinking habits unscathed.

Marion Briggs made brief introductions. The young-looking ex-show girl was Betsy Gray, nowadays Mrs. Kendall Crane. Beside her was Mrs. Benedict. I remembered her from the gossip columns, Nicky Benedict's beautiful wife, Claire. The babe at the bar was Miss Zita Allen. They were all glad to meet the two of us; Zita was especially glad to meet Jeff.

Then Miss Briggs conducted us to our room, and after suggesting that we be downstairs for cocktails in half an hour, she went away. Jeff looked around the incredibly sumptuous bedroom and clicked his tongue in disappointment.

"What's wrong with this room?" I demanded.

"No swimming pool."

"You and Zita," I said, "can swim in the living room. I hope Zita doesn't give the rest of the girls the impression you belong to her and cramp your style."

Jeff took me in his arms and kissed me soundly. But I didn't believe it. I took a shower, then settled down at my dressing table with my make-up case and went to work. This, I knew, was going to be the battle of my life.

"Hurry up, Haila," Jeff said.

"One more minute. Where do you suppose our host is?"

"Probably in the dining room playing basketball. Come on, Haila."

Mr. Bartlett Wilton was in the living room. He was not at all what I expected. As he sat in the midst of his five gorgeous guests, he looked like a proud, daddy-type father holding court with his beautiful daughters. He was a bouncing little man in his middle fifties. This climate was the thing for Mr. Wilton, no doubt about it. His round cherub face glowed with good health. He came trotting toward us, both hands extended, his smile as big as a welcome mat.

"Mr. and Mrs. Troy!" he cried. "How wonderful to have you here!"

"It's wonderful to be here," Jeff said sincerely.

"It's Jeff, isn't it? And Haila?"

We nodded and from across the room Zita shouted raucously, "Call him Bobo!"

"Now, Zita," our host said, beaming like a boy, "Bobo is so undignified."

"You are Bobo," Zita said. "Our Bobo."

"And we adore you," Claire drawled in her husky, lazy voice.

"You'd better!" Bobo said. "Haila and Jeff, you haven't met all my girls yet. You haven't met Joyce or Shirley."

Bobo introduced us first to the auburn-haired movie star. I had never completely liked Joyce Revere on the screen. On film she seemed too perfect to be true, but in person she was friendly and warm. I immediately forgave her for being so gorgeous.

Then we met Shirley. She was now Mrs. Malcolm Wharton, and Mr. Wharton was undoubtedly a wonderful man. I'd never seen a happier-looking woman than his wife. She couldn't have had a worry in the world; certainly she didn't worry about her looks. In fact, it took more than a little imagination to see how Shirley could once have been one of the famous *Watch Out!* girls.

It isn't hard, of course, for great big girls to become great big fat girls, and all these long-stemmed beauties prob-

ably waged an endless battle against the calorie. But not Shirley. Shirley was plump; she was nice and fat. She had something none of her friends had, and it made her lovely and attractive in her own way. She shone with contentment; she was relaxed. I liked her by far the best.

"Haila!" Bobo cried. "Jeff! I hope you like champagne."

We both said we did. Bobo was so glad.

"I'm very annoyed with Zita," he said. "This is a champagne time and she insists on drinking her brandy."

"Doctor's orders," Zita said and laughed, too loudly.

Bobo skipped to the bar. "Champagne for the Troys!" he said. "And then I'll tell you my surprise! You won't believe it, you won't!"

While Bobo wrestled joyfully with a cork, the girls chattered away like a bunch of long-separated sorority sisters. Then I noticed that the little sister of the group, Betsy Crane, was moving from girl to girl, whispering into ears. There was a prankish look in her eyes and as each of her friends heard her secret, she nodded and laughed. Betsy came to Jeff and me.

"Bobo always has a terrific stunt for his parties," she whispered. "Trick treasure hunts—things like that. But

when he tells us about it, don't be surprised. Act as though it's nothing. Bobo will be furious."

She slipped away from us as our host approached, thrusting tall exquisite glasses into our hands. He circled the room with the bottle; Zita shook her head and helped herself to more brandy. Now it was time for Bobo's sensational announcement. Jeff lifted his camera to record the moment for posterity.

Bobo raised his hand. His guests leaned forward in mock anticipation. Then Bobo showed that he had learned a theatrical trick or two during his semesters on Broadway. He didn't whoop it up; he spoke very quietly.

"Lenna MacLane is coming," he said. "She'll be here tomorrow morning."

There was dead silence. At first I thought the girls were playing Betsy's prank. Then, almost instantly, I realized that everyone was too stunned to speak. Bobo's surprise had been too much for them; Bobo had thrown a bomb. Suddenly they were all talking at once, all shrieking with excitement. I wondered if I had heard correctly. It couldn't be simply that someone named Lenna MacLane was coming. It must be at least Winston Churchill, or even George Washington.

I gathered from the almost hysterical jabbering that Lenna had been one of the *Watch Out!* girls, that nobody had seen her for years and years, and that everyone was just dying to see her again. Everybody, that is, except Betsy. Betsy's initial surprise had not been one of pleasure. As she sat quietly, her lovely young schoolgirl face hardened, I thought, into resentment. She was not dying to see her old friend again; to Betsy Crane the news that Lenna MacLane was arriving was definitely not joyous news.

Bobo pounded on the bar, and the questions that were being fired at him came to a stop. "I'll tell you all I know," he said. "Lenna phoned this afternoon. She didn't even need to tell me who it was—she sounded just the same. She said she was in Albuquerque; she wouldn't be able to leave there until two thirty tomorrow morning. She wanted someone to meet her then, at the Hotel Scott, and I said Miss Briggs would. She—"

"Two thirty in the morning!" Shirley exploded. "And she's already in Albuquerque! But why? Why can't she come now, right away?"

"Some business," Bobo said. "Some things she had to do. She didn't say what. Only that she wants to see us all again,

even though it's only for a little while. She's taking the noon plane tomorrow."

"Why, she'll practically be here only for breakfast!" Zita said.

"Where's she going in such a hurry?" Joyce asked.

Bobo shrugged. "She said she'd tell us everything when she sees us tomorrow. But isn't it exciting?"

The order Bobo had managed to establish went to pieces; conversational pandemonium prevailed. In the next half hour I heard enough bits and pieces of information about Lenna MacLane to know her strange, sad story.

Lenna, it seemed, had been the most beautiful of all the *Watch Out!* girls. Her loveliness was dramatic—shining hair framing a complexion that was baby-fair, an ultra-divine figure, the poise of a Lynn Fontanne. She had been a young goddess.

The Hollywood boys had swarmed like locusts around Lenna. It was only after they saw they were wasting their time that they noticed Joyce Revere and took her West with them. And if the Hollywood boys didn't know then why Lenna had spurned their offers, they soon found out. Shortly after the show closed she married Clyde Halmont. Clyde's father hadn't quite succeeded in

cornering all the money in the world before he died, but he did all right financially. And Lenna MacLane had done all right, too.

Clyde Halmont was a wild young man-about-town, but Lenna seemed to be the girl to tame him. Tragically, she never had much of a chance. Only a few months after their marriage he had been killed.

It was Claire Benedict who told me about the accident. "It was at a picnic party at Bobo's," she said. "He was still living in the East then, you know. And Clyde was drunker that day than usual, and he wandered away from the rest of us. We found his body late that night at the bottom of a cliff.

"The doctors said that the fall had killed him instantly. It was horrible, of course, and Lenna couldn't seem to get over it. She started drinking too much; she wouldn't see any of us. Then she left New York and we never saw her again, never even heard of her."

"None of us," Bobo said, "ever saw her again."

"I did," Zita said. "I saw her."

"When?" Bobo demanded. "Where?"

"Seven or eight years ago. In Detroit."

"But you never told us!" Claire said.

"I promised Lenna I wouldn't. But now that she's coming out of hiding I guess it doesn't matter." Zita took a long drink of her brandy and soda. "She was working in the line at a crummy club, using a phony name. When I went back to talk to her, she pretended to be glad to see me. But she wasn't. I guess she couldn't stand seeing anyone connected with the old days. That's what drove her from New York, of course. I didn't try to see her again."

"I wonder," Shirley Wharton said, her round placid face wrinkled with perplexity now, "why Lenna would work in a night club. She's heir to all the Halmont money."

"Lenna," Claire said, "was a girl who would do almost anything rather than be idle. She had such energy and so much talent. She wasn't like the rest of us. She was an actress." Claire smiled and shifted her voice back into its café-society gear. "Don't shoot, Joyce darling. You, too, of course. You and Lenna, the two of you had all our talent."

Joyce smiled good-humoredly. "I know exactly how much talent I have. I've seen a few of my pictures. It's my legs, not my acting, that's box office. But you're right about Lenna's acting talent. The only reason I

got a movie contract was because Lenna wouldn't go to Hollywood. And now, just think, she's coming here!"

"Does that make all of you?" I asked. "Were there just six *Watch Out!* girls?"

"No," Betsy said, "there were two others. Dixie was killed in a plane crash years ago. And Janice got married, went abroad to live—oh, the summer after the show closed. But that's all of us—the whole line."

Almost as suddenly as if someone had pulled a switch, the living room darkened. A gust of wind rippled the water in the pool. Bobo leaped into action and cranked the glass wall down across the pool, and in a moment a torrent of rain was slashing at it. There was lightning and the roaring rumble of thunder.

Shirley Wharton gave out with her matronly chuckle. "It's a good thing Lenna isn't here right now."

"Why?" Jeff asked. "The storm, you mean?"

"Yes, she'd be under the nearest bed. She was terrified of thunder and lightning; we all used to tease her about it. That was strange, too, for Lenna wasn't afraid of anything else in the world."

"I'll say she wasn't," Joyce said. "She was a tough baby, our Lenna. Remember the night

she fell backstage and cut her knee? She made the doctor sew her up right there and then. She just gritted her teeth and made cracks about the doctor's lousy needlework."

"And remember the time she and Zita got locked in the theater and—but that's Zita's story. She tells it so funny. Where is Zita? Hey, kids, where's Zita?"

Betsy said, "She was here a minute ago."

"I told her to take a nap," Claire said. "Maybe she's taken my advice."

Shirley lifted her head indignantly. "The way Zita drinks! It's awful. Why does she do it?"

"She enjoys it," Bobo said. "She always did."

"Zita never did have very much restraint," Claire said.

Joyce shook a finger at the group. "Now, now," she said; "you know we can't talk behind Zita's back. We never could. Somehow she always found out about it and put us on the carpet—"

"You bet I did!" Zita could be heard but not seen. Then she popped up in the center of the bar. She grinned at Joyce. "And in a minute I'm putting you all on the carpet. But, first, Bobo, where do you hide your brandy? Is there a secret panel in this bar?"

A shockingly close bolt of lightning turned the air blue. Its partner thunder shivered the glasses on the bar and pummeled our ears. As it died away, we all looked at one another to see if this new sound we heard was actual. Then Jeff was on his feet and racing for the door. We were all right behind him.

The shrill scream that we had heard had spent itself now and only a whimpering sound came to us from somewhere in the old mission. Jeff led us through an arch and turned left into a long corridor that flanked the patio. Then he stopped and bent over the figure on the floor. I heard him shout, "Miss Briggs! What's wrong? What happened?"

He was helping Marion Briggs to her feet. He spoke to her sharply, and in a moment she had pulled herself back into control.

"I—I'm not sure what happened," she said. "Someone pushed me, knocked me down. I was standing here, you see, trying to see if the station wagon windows were closed. I heard a sound behind me and I started to turn. Hands reached out—pushed me—"

"You didn't see who it was?"

"No, I couldn't."

"Which direction did he go?"



She pointed down the corridor, in the opposite direction. "Into that wing, I think."

Bobo said, "If he went in there, he's still there. This is the only way out."

"I'll take a look," Jeff said, and he was gone before anyone had a chance to volunteer to go with him.

We stood there, all of us, for what seemed hours. Then, just as I was about to organize a searching party for my husband, he was walking back toward us. He was alone.

"There's no one in there," he said. "Whoever it was, Bobo, knows a way out even if you don't."

"But I'm sure I'm right," Bobo said.

"You can't be," Jeff said. "I'll look around outside."

Marion Briggs said, "Mr. Wilton, I'd like to go to my room."

"You're sure you're all right?" Bobo asked.

"I'm all right. I only want to lie down."

"One of the girls will stay with you," Bobo said.

"That won't be necessary, Mr. Wilton."

"But I insist," Bobo said. "I—"

"Mrs. Troy," Marion said, "you come with me."

"Of course," I said.

Marion Briggs's room was

near ours, on the same corridor. It was beautifully furnished, but she had done nothing to make it seem hers. There was a military neatness about it. Marion stretched out on the wide bed and I tucked a blanket around her. She closed her eyes, but only for a moment.

She said, "Thanks, but you needn't stay with me, Mrs. Troy."

"Miss Briggs, tell me. Whoever it was that attacked you, was he trying to hurt you?"

She waited until a distant clap of thunder had rolled into silence. She said, "No, I'm sure he wasn't. I think he was only preventing me from seeing who it was."

"Could you tell if it was a man?"

"No, I couldn't."

"Miss Briggs, who's here in this house now? What about the help?"

"It's day help, and all of them are gone now except for the cook and her granddaughter." She smiled grimly. "Neither of them is strong enough to knock me down. Besides, why should they?"

"Has anything like this ever happened before?"

She shook her head. "No, never." She flipped the blanket off her and sat up. "I've got to see about dinner. Nothing must spoil Mr. Wilton's party. He



lives all year for this one week-end."

"You stay where you are," I said. "And look. Jeff and I will drive into Albuquerque tonight and pick up Lenna MacLane. You ought to rest."

"Thanks," she said, "but that's my job and I'll do it."

She excused herself abruptly and went into her bath to wash up. I walked down the corridor to our room. From downstairs came the thump of an enthusiastically but badly played piano. A husky voice that must have been Zita's was murdering an old blues number. I heard Bobo yelling "Bravo!" and girls' voices shrieking with laughter. Nothing, in fact, was spoiling Mr. Wilton's party.

I found Jeff changing his clothes. He had got himself soaking wet in his outdoor search for Marion Briggs's strange assailant. He hadn't found anyone or anything that could explain the incident, but that, it seemed, had not surprised him.

"If he's still around here," Jeff said, "there are a million places for him to hide. That old mission—someone could hide there for days without being seen. All those balconies and passageways and little rooms."

"Is anyone staying in it?"

"No, it isn't even furnished. Bobo has an idea about making

it into a theater, if he can figure out how to get an audience out here. How does Miss Briggs feel about being pushed around?"

"Better than I do. She's her old phlegmatic self again. What do you think about it, Jeff?"

He shrugged. "Maybe it's just the wild and woolly West. If nobody else is going to worry about it, why should we? Let's join the party."

The party zoomed through the evening, and at one in the morning it collapsed like a tired tent. Bobo hadn't needed any help in keeping the champagne glasses filled, but Miss Briggs assisted him, anyway. She was a very conscientious worker; she earned her salary. Although she drank nothing, she was heartily in favor of others drinking.

I was rather proud of myself. I was the only one of Bobo's guests who got up the stairs without using the banister. It was a good thing that Miss Briggs had insisted on driving to Albuquerque. Jeff was in no shape to have done it, purely and simply in no shape. He fell into bed like a lump of clay.

I was awakened by what I thought was a knock on our door. Enough moonlight seeped through our blinds to show me the way across the room. But the corridor outside was pitch-black.

"Who is it?" I whispered.

"Oh, Mrs. Troy," Marion Briggs said, "I'm so sorry. I bumped into your door in the darkness. I'm sorry."

"It's all right. Did you meet Lenna MacLane?"

"Oh, yes!" There was an enthusiasm in the housekeeper's voice I hadn't heard before. "Oh, yes, I brought her back."

"What's she like? The most beautiful of them all?"

"Far the most beautiful. And she's more than that, too. She's gay and funny and—no wonder they're all so anxious to see her."

"I am, too, Miss Briggs, you be sure I don't miss breakfast."

"I'll be sure. Good night, Mrs. Troy."

Jeff and I both beat Miss Briggs and Lenna MacLane down to breakfast, but no one else. We found the rest of the ex-show girls and their host already seated around a huge food-laden table on the sunny patio. There was an air of tenseness about the girls as they waited for Lenna to appear. They were dying to see their old friend again; they were also dying for her to see them as she remembered them—beautiful, glamorous young things.

A lot of work had been done before a lot of mirrors that morning. Even Shirley had gallantly risen to the occasion. I

could see by the outline that showed through her white flannel slacks that she had gone so far as to struggle into a girdle. Never before, at such an early hour, had so many women looked so casually, carelessly perfect.

Lenna could hardly be called, at this point, late for breakfast, but Bobo was groaning with impatience. "How could she do this to us? She must know how anxious we are to see her."

"The gorgeous brat," Joyce said, "is building up an entrance for herself." She smiled. "I know I would."

"Or else she's waiting," Claire said, "until this sun melts our make-up and the wind blows our hair off our heads. Then she'll float out here and make us look like dogs."

"She might sleep all morning," Bobo wailed. "And if she really has to catch a plane we'll hardly even see her."

Betsy stood up. In her brief blue shorts she looked like a Junior Women's Tennis Champ. She patted Bobo's shoulder.

"I'm going to drag her down here," she said.

Shirley fluffed her fingers through her brown hair as she watched Betsy lope along the swimming pool and into the house. "Maybe," she said, and there was a wistful note in her

voice, "maybe Lenna's changed. After all, it's been years, and people *do* change. I know about that."

"Shirley," Bobo said, "there's a little more of you, but, as for me, there just can't be too much of you. I love you."

Joyce Revere said, "Lenna might look different, but she still sounds the same as ever."

"How do you know?" Zita demanded.

"Lenna woke me."

"Then you've seen her!" Bobo said accusingly.

"No, darling, I only heard her. It must have been when Miss Briggs was taking her to her room. I heard Lenna laugh. It was the same old whoop and holler, as if Miss Briggs had just said the funniest thing in the world. You remember that trick of hers, don't you?"

"The glamor girls," Zita said, "are still imitating her."

Joyce nodded, smiling. "It was good to hear Lenna's laugh again."

"But how could you keep from rushing out to see her?" Bobo demanded.

"Bobo, at four o'clock in the morning I wouldn't let my own mother see me. At night the Revere kisser goes into dry dock for repairs. Don't you know about us girls yet?"

It was the sound of the

footsteps that turned us all toward the house. They were stiff and stiltlike, as if someone was walking in a nightmare. Then Betsy Crane came out into the sunlight and moved toward us, slowly, carefully, her hands tight at her sides. Her face was gray beneath its coat of tan and her eyes were not seeing us.

"Quick," she said. She tried to say more, her hands rose to her throat as if to wrench out the words, but nothing came.

She crumpled quietly down onto the flagstone terrace.

Jeff was in the house almost before the others had risen to crowd around Betsy, and I followed him, through the cavernous living room, into the circular hall, and up its swirling stairway. We went down the corridor, past our room, on around a corner into a wing. At the end of the wing a door stood half open.

I saw Jeff plunge into that room and then, just as quickly, back out again. He threw up his hands and caught me by the shoulders, trying to turn me away. But he was too late, a moment too late.

I had already seen the body sprawled hideously on the floor, and the heavy brass fireplace tool that had been abandoned beside it. There was nothing but a crimson blotch

where the face had been, but I knew from the thick, awkward body in its dowdy clothing that Miss Marion Briggs had been brutally beaten to death.

Late in the afternoon, for the second time that day, Saul Lansing, the county police official in charge of investigating the murder of Marion Briggs, walked into Bobo's house. He looked at the eight of us huddled together in the living room. He shook his head in answer to the question in our eyes.

"No," he said, "we haven't caught up with Lenna MacLane. We haven't even found a trace of her."

It was incredible, but there could be no other answer. Lenna MacLane had murdered Marion Briggs. So far as anyone knew, she had never seen her victim until they had met, at two thirty in the morning in Albuquerque. Yet she had killed her.

For some reason Miss Briggs had returned to Lenna's room after talking to me in the corridor. Lenna had struck her down, beating her violently. Then she had slipped out into the night. She had left no prints on the weapon, nothing of herself behind.

Lansing rubbed his long chin with the back of his hand. "Mr.

Wilton," he said, "have you located those pictures?"

Bobo nodded. From his jacket pocket he took a package of snapshots and handed them to the detective. "I've sorted them for you. Those are all of Lenna MacLane. They're only snaps, but some of them are quite good."

Lansing spread them out on the table top. There were twenty-five or thirty pictures of the tall dark girl in shorts, all of them unposed, all stunningly beautiful.

"These were all taken the same day?" Lansing said.

"Yes," Bobo said. "That was my big stunt for that particular party. A picture contest. I gave everyone a little camera and rolls of film. There was to be a prize for the best snapshot, and the funniest, and—oh, lots of prizes. It was a cute idea, I thought."

Lansing was studying the pictures carefully. "You haven't any taken later than these? Anything more recent?"

Bobo shook his head. "No. You see, it was that day that Lenna's husband was killed. She never came to any more of my parties. I never saw her again."

"Well," Lansing said, "if she's still as beautiful as she was then, she can't get far without being noticed. It would help, though, if we were sure what

she's like now, if we knew what she was wearing—"

Bobo interrupted him. "The only person in this house who saw her was Marion Briggs. And Marion—" his voice faltered.

Now it was Shirley Wharton who said again what one or another of the girls had been saying all day long: "Lenna didn't do it. I knew Lenna. She wouldn't have murdered—"

"No one believes that anyone they know could commit a murder," Lansing said softly. "Not until after they've committed it."

"But not like this!" Shirley cried. "Not beating her to death like that!"

"Then why," he asked, "do you suppose she ran away?"

"I don't know," Shirley said miserably. Then she lifted her chin defiantly and the softness went out of her round plump face as she challenged the policeman. "But I know she wouldn't kill her like that. And not Marion Briggs. She didn't even know her!"

"Maybe," Lansing said, almost to himself. "Maybe those two did know each other." He turned to Bobo. "Mr. Wilton, you said Miss Briggs had worked for you for about seven months."

"Yes."

"How did you find her? She answer an ad?"

"Nothing like that," Bobo said. "I found her one day doing a painting of the old mission. She was back again the next day. When I discovered she intended returning, I invited her to stay the night. She wasn't an attractive woman, nor especially friendly, but there was something about her I liked. I get lonely here and—well, when she asked me if there was anything she could do to earn her board and keep I invented a job."

"She seemed to love this spot so, I really wanted her to stay. As it turned out, she became invaluable. She was my housekeeper, secretary, chauffeur. I don't like a lot of servants about and because of her I was able to get rid of the driver and housekeeper I had. Neither of them was very efficient."

Bobo's voice faltered again. "I genuinely liked her. She was pathetic, perhaps—so ungainly and awkward and uncommunicative—but I'm going to miss her."

"Where did she come from?" Lansing asked.

"She was brought up somewhere in the Middle West. She had no family, at least no one near her. She'd drifted around, working as a waitress—jobs like that. She never spoke much of her past. Not because there

seemed to be anything tragic about it, but, I always felt, because it was uninteresting. She was terribly self-conscious. I'm sure her reticence was partly due to her fear of boring people."

"Was she a good painter?" Jeff asked.

"Atrocious," Bobo said. "That was pathetic, too. I think she was always hoping for a miracle, that she had some hidden talent. But it wasn't painting, and she soon knew it and forgot it. She gave her oils to the cook's granddaughter."

Lansing was looking meditatively at Jeff. "Why did you ask that question, Troy?"

"I don't know," Jeff said. "Kind of silly, wasn't it?"

"I've been checking up on all of you, you know. Just routine, of course. The New York police tell me, Troy, that you've been of help from time to time to their Homicide Bureau."

"They've never admitted that to me," Jeff said.

"Jeff Troy! Of course!" Claire Benedict said. "I've seen your name in the columns in New York. I never thought of you as a photographer; that threw me."

"I only make a living taking pictures," Jeff said.

"Troy," Lansing said, "what do you think about this Lenna MacLane?"

"I'm wondering about her," Jeff said. "For instance, I wondered how she managed to get away from here. By running off like that she practically admitted that she was guilty of the murder. So why didn't she take one of Bobo's cars?"

"Because she didn't kill Marion Briggs!" Claire said fiercely. "When she left here, she didn't even know that Marion was dead! I can swear that she didn't! I could tell that she didn't know..."

Claire's voice trailed off as we stared at her. She lifted a fist to her mouth as if to thrust back the words. She stammered in confusion, trying to explain away the slip.

"Mrs. Benedict," Lansing said, "you saw Lenna MacLane while she was in this house."

"No, I—"

"You saw her. Did you speak to her?"

Claire saw the angry flush that was beginning to rise in the police official's face. She said quickly, "Yes, I saw her. I spoke to her."

"What time was that?"

"Early this morning. Just before six, I guess; it was beginning to get light. I woke and I couldn't go back to sleep. I was thinking about Lenna and that I couldn't stand waiting till breakfast to see her. After all, I'd been closer to her in the old

days than the others and—"

"All right, Mrs. Benedict." Lansing was impatient. "You went to her room. What happened?"

"No, I didn't get to her room. I found Lenna tiptoeing down the stairs. She was completely dressed and had an overnight bag in her hand. I was astonished, of course. She told me she was leaving, that she couldn't bear to see the old crowd again. It would bring back that awful night again, the accident."

"Her husband's death?" Lansing asked.

"Yes. I could see that she still hadn't got over it. In fact, in those few minutes we talked, she almost broke down. She said she was going to walk to the highway and flag a ride back to Albuquerque. She asked me to explain to everyone how it was and then—then she literally ran from me."

"Claire," Bobo said, "you let us sit here at the breakfast table this morning and wait for Lenna to come down. Why didn't you tell us?"

"I promised Lenna, Bobo. She begged me not to tell anyone she'd gone. She was afraid you'd chase after her and try to bring her back."

"I would have, too!" Bobo said. "Unless, of course, you'd

told me how unhappy it would have made her."

"What I want to know," Lansing said, "is why you've kept quiet about this after you knew that Marion Briggs had been murdered."

"Because," Claire said hotly, "you're wrong in thinking that Lenna is guilty! I didn't want you to know when she left or how she got away! I wanted to give her more time."

"More time to run away from a murder she didn't commit? It seems to me," Lansing said grimly, "that you're being more loyal to your old friend than logical. Also, you may be aiding and abetting a criminal. You could have helped us, Mrs. Benedict. We needed a description of Lenna MacLane and you could have given it to us hours ago. What is she like?"

Claire looked at him silently, her face hard.

"Claire," Jeff said, "if Lenna is innocent—"

"All right!" Claire said. "She's as lovely as she ever was. She looks the same as she did when that picture was taken, almost exactly the same. And she didn't look as if she had just—just—"

She turned to face Jeff. "You don't think that she could have done it, do you? She probably still doesn't even



know there's been a murder!"

Jeff said, "Claire, I don't suppose she told you where she was going?"

"No. Only back to Albuquerque, then away."

"Did she say anything about where she had come from? Where she'd been all these years?"

Claire shook her head. "No. She didn't want to talk to me; she wanted to get out of here. She said she'd write, but I knew she was only saying that to get away from me."

"Now, listen, girls," Lansing said. "Being the Lenna MacLane fan club is very sweet. I love you for it. But things look pretty bad for your old friend. There was that attack on Miss Briggs last evening—"

"But Lenna didn't do that!" Shirley cried. "She wasn't even here then!"

"She was in Albuquerque yesterday afternoon—she called Mr. Wilton from there. It's not impossible that she sneaked up here in the evening, tried to murder Marion Briggs then, and failed."

"And then went back to Albuquerque and waited to be picked up?" Jeff asked.

"Why not?"

"She wouldn't have phoned in that case; she wouldn't have let us know she was anywhere near."

"Maybe," Lansing said, "that would have been her alibi, that phone call. Anyway, what was she doing in Albuquerque yesterday? Why did she insist on being picked up in the middle of the night?"

Jeff shrugged. "I don't know."

"And if it wasn't she who attacked Miss Briggs yesterday, who was it?"

"I don't know that, either," Jeff said. "But Miss Briggs didn't think that the person who pushed her was trying to kill her, or even hurt her. She thought it was only that he didn't want to be seen."

Lansing shook his head hopelessly. "There's no use going on like this. We're getting nowhere. The one thing to do is find Lenna MacLane. Mrs. Benedict, what was she wearing when you saw her?"

"A light gray suit," Claire said reluctantly. "A small blue hat with a tiny veil."

"Thanks," Lansing said. "I'll get that on the wire. With any luck I'll be calling you soon to say we've got her."

I looked around the room, and on the faces of the five young women and their host I saw the horror that murder brings into a house. Just twenty-four hours ago this had been a party of gay, laughing people, excited by the prospect



of reunion with an old friend. Now the murdered body of Marion Briggs lay in a friar's cell in the old mission, waiting for the police ambulance to free itself from local duties in Albuquerque and carry it down the mountain. Now that old friend was wanted for murder. Soon every policeman in the country would be watching for a beautiful woman in a light gray suit, a small blue hat with a tiny veil.

It still lacked a few minutes of being exactly one night and one day ago that Marion Briggs's scream had forewarned us that this reunion might not be a happy one. But even that had not quelled the gaiety of these girls; it had taken murder to do that. Now they were inert, frozen with horror and anxiety.

The evening dragged through a dinner that was scarcely touched. We stayed together in the big living room. We sat, not talking, only wondering about Lenna MacLane and how close to her the police might now be. And we listened for the ambulance that was taking so long to come, wishing that it would hurry.

It was an evening of telephone calls. Worrying families and friends of the girls, from all over the country, had wanted to know how long they

would be detained. Joyce Revere, alone, must have had two dozen calls from Hollywood. Shirley's husband, and Claire's, were flying west together from New York. Betsy's husband arrived from Duluth early in the evening.

Kendall Crane was an attractive young man, dark and intense. He was nervous with concern over Betsy. He had gathered her into his arms, and it was then that she had gone completely, hysterically to pieces. He had had to carry her to the room that Bobo had arranged for them.

It wasn't much later that Bobo and all the girls, except Zita, had wandered miserably to their rooms. Zita took what little was left of a bottle of brandy and weaved her way out onto the patio. I followed her and tried to talk her into calling it a day, but she was too tight to bother listening to me.

So I rejoined Jeff at the bar, split a nightcap, then climbed the stairs to bed. It was while Jeff and I were undressing that our phone rang. Jeff picked up the receiver, and while he held it in his hand the bell rang again.

I said, "It must be the house phone."

He stepped to the small instrument on the wall beside the door. "Hello," he said.

From all the way across the room I could hear Zita Allen's voice. It was blurred with something more than alcohol; it was stricken with terror. She was shouting horribly, almost jabbering.

"Lenna's dead!" she screamed. "Lenna's murdered! I saw her—"

That was all that she had time to say. Something made her shriek in horror.

We had trouble finding her in that sprawling, many-roomed house. When we did get to her, she was dead. She had been strangled.

She lay grotesquely on the pantry floor, and above her the house phone's receiver dangled, still swaying, at the end of its cord.

The next morning was brilliantly lovely. The New Mexico sun was having no cloud competition at all, and it bathed the mountains as if it loved them. As far as I could see from our bedroom window there was nothing but peaceful, soothing grandeur.

Then the black ambulance crawled into my sight like a nasty black bug. I closed my eyes against it, but that did no good. Inside the car were the murdered bodies of Marion Briggs and Zita Allen. And somewhere near lay the hidden

corpse of Lenna MacLane.

Now the pattern of the tragedy had emerged. There might be other answers, other solutions; we had found only one that was possible or logical. The prime victim had been Lenna MacLane. Somehow she had known, or sensed, her danger in this house and had run from it. The story she told Claire had been a lie; she was fleeing from this house in fear. She had tried to escape and hadn't made it. Somewhere the killer had caught up with her, murdered her, and hidden the body.

Marion Briggs had learned the truth, and so she had been beaten to death. And Zita, in her drunken wanderings, had come upon Lenna's body, and she had paid for that knowledge.

There was a tap-tap on our bedroom door. Jeff roused himself out of a chair and opened the door for Saul Lansing. It was a tired, bewildered policeman who walked into our room. He slumped into the chair Jeff had vacated.

Jeff said, "I see you've called your men off. They've stopped looking for Lenna MacLane's body."

"They've stopped looking for it in the house and mission."

"You shouldn't let them get discouraged," Jeff said. "That old mission has a thousand hiding places."

"The boys have been over a thousand of them," Lansing said. "It isn't there. Look, Troy. We know that Zita Allen saw the body. How much time did she have? How far could she have gone? You and your wife were the last people, except for the killer, to see Zita Allen alive."

"I'd say she had about an hour. Right, Haila?"

I nodded. "Just about."

"Then," Lansing said, "Zita might have found Lenna MacLane's body any place within a mile of the house. She stumbled back here. She got as far as the kitchen phone, before the murderer caught up with her."

"Zita might have known where to look for the body," Jeff said. "She might have figured out that Lenna was murdered and where her body was hidden."

"Maybe. I hope we'll have the answer to all the questions before long." He started to rise, then decided to rest a bit more. He sighed and said, "Troy, I've just had a phone session with the lawyer in New York who handles the inheritance from the Halmont estate."

"It's a lot of money, isn't it?"

"More than a lot," Lansing said. "Halmont Senior left everything to his son. When Clyde was killed in the accident Lenna became the heir. In two years from now all that million and a half would have been hers."

"Oh," Jeff said. "One of those delayed-action wills. Wise father doesn't let errant son get his busy little hands on all the fortune at once. It's kept away from him until he's older and smarter."

"That was what old Halmont had in mind. Clyde was apparently a real wild one."

"He was that," I said. "I can remember the swath he cut through New York."

"The kid got a hundred thousand when he was twenty-one," Lansing said, "and another hundred thousand when he was twenty-five, the year he married Lenna. That was all until he was thirty-five, which would have been the year after next. His pop figured he'd given him ten years on his own. He'd either use that money intelligently or, if he squandered it, he'd learn the value of money by not having any. As it turned out, he did squander most of it. When he was killed, Lenna got about forty thousand. And she had to wait, as he would have, for the remainder of the estate."

"And now that she's dead," Jeff said, "who gets it?"

Lansing shook his head. "Nobody would kill her for it, Troy. A dozen different charities get it."

"So," Jeff said, "there's no motive for her murder in that money."

"None that I can see."

"But can't this lawyer help in any other way?" Jeff asked. "Can't he fill in those lost years of Lenna's? Where she's been, what she's been doing?"

"No. The estate hasn't had any contact with her since she left New York; there hasn't been any reason to. Of course, when the money comes due the estate would have had to locate her. But they weren't worried about that. They figure that when someone has a million and a half dollars waiting for them, they usually turn up."

Saul Lansing got wearily to his feet. "I've a little matter to talk over with Betsy Crane," he said. "You might come along. It's not a job I like to do alone. That girl's in bad shape."

The detective had not been guilty of exaggeration; Betsy Crane was in very bad shape. All the girls had been shocked by the ghastliness of the murders. They were still too stunned to have started mourning the two girls they had known so well, or Marion

Briggs, whose tragedy was to have accidentally been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

But Betsy Crane seemed to have been touched by something the others had been spared. The others seemed to be thinking only of the past. Betsy's eyes seemed fastened on the future, and cringing from what they saw there.

We found her in her bedroom, and I scarcely recognized her. The buoyant, youthful beauty had drained from her face, and it was gray and strained. She was sitting in her bed, hunched against the headboard, as though she were facing a firing squad. Her young husband was in a torment of worry about her. He took his eyes only briefly off Betsy to see who had walked into the room.

Saul Lansing was as gentle with her as a father with a stricken child. He said, "I'm sorry. I've got to talk to you again, Mrs. Crane."

"I understand," Betsy said tonelessly.

"Tell me—you and Mr. Crane were married secretly shortly before the show closed. Is that right?"

"Yes."

Lansing turned to Kendall Crane. "Then of course you knew Lenna MacLane," he said.

"Yes, I knew her."

"You left New York and moved to Duluth?"

"Yes."

"But both of you were still in New York when Lenna disappeared. You were still there when her husband was killed."

"Yes," Crane said.

"Did you see much of her before that, after the show closed?"

Abruptly, Betsy said, "I saw very little of her."

"I saw her exactly as often as Betsy did," Crane said.

Lansing was looking at Betsy now. "Mrs. Crane, you weren't one of Lenna's good friends?"

"We were never very close," Betsy said.

"Did you dislike her?"

"No. We were simply never very close."

The policeman sat quietly for a moment. Then from his jacket pocket he drew a yellow silk scarf. He dropped it into Betsy's lap. He said, "This is yours, Mrs. Crane. It has your monogram on it."

"Yes, it's mine," Betsy was puzzled. "How do you happen to have it?"

"You lost it," Lansing said.

"I did? I wasn't aware of it."

"Don't you know where you might have left it?"

"No, I—" Confusion crept into Betsy's voice. "I told you I didn't know."

"Could you have left it in Mr. Wilton's convertible?"

"No, I haven't been in his convertible."

"It was found there, Mrs. Crane. On the floor under the steering wheel."

Kendall Crane said angrily, "Stop it, Lansing! You're playing cat and mouse with Betsy! If you have anything to say—"

Lansing interrupted him, and all the gentleness was gone from his voice. "All right, Mrs. Crane. Yesterday morning the gardener noticed that one of the fenders on the convertible was dented. It hadn't been when he washed the car the afternoon before. During the night someone used that car. Your scarf was found in it, Mrs. Crane. You've had twenty-four hours to tell me that you used that car the night Lenna MacLane and Marion Briggs were murdered. I've asked you to account for your time, and you've told me that you never left your room. Now I want the truth. Where did you go in that car? What did you do?"

"I—I didn't do anything special. I only went for a drive."

"Only a drive," Lansing said. "But you didn't bother telling Wilton that you'd smashed his fender. You didn't bother telling me that you went out."

"I didn't even know that I'd hurt the car!" Betsy cried. "That's why I didn't tell Bobo! And I didn't tell you—oh, I don't know why I didn't! After all that had happened it seemed so unimportant."

"After all that had happened," Lansing said, "it was very important. It still is. Where did you go, Mrs. Crane?"

"Just driving, as I told you! I couldn't sleep after I'd got to bed. I'd had too much champagne, I needed fresh air. I took the convertible. I knew that Miss Briggs would take the station wagon to get Lenna."

"Oh. So it was before Miss Briggs left for Albuquerque that you took your drive?"

"Yes. I rode down to the highway, and then I realized I shouldn't be driving. I'd had too much to drink. I must have dented the fender when I turned around. I put the car away and went back to bed. I couldn't have been gone for more than twenty minutes."

I glanced at Kendall Crane as Betsy spoke, and I saw the wonder and disbelief in his eyes. Then, instantly, he was able to conceal it. He stepped forward and sat on the edge of the bed.

"Darling," he said, "you should have told Lansing about this right away. It's all right, it doesn't matter."

"Please," Betsy said. "Please."

She turned away from him, buried her face in the pillow. Lansing stood looking down at her, and from his eyes I knew that young Mrs. Kendall Crane was in trouble. "Try to get some rest," he said shortly. He motioned to Jeff and me, and we followed him out of the room.

At the door I looked back. Betsy's face was still buried out of sight. Her husband rose from the bed and was walking away from it when Jeff pulled the door shut.

Once out in the corridor Lansing left us abruptly. From the head of the stairs we watched him cross the circular hallway and disappear through the arch into the mission. His voice drifted to us from the patio as he called to one of his men.

We found Bobo and his guests in the living room. The quartet was seated in a tight little group around the coffee table beside the pool. Bobo had neglected, understandably, his morning ritual of raising the glassed wall and its blind to let in the sun and permit the breeze to riffle the indoor half of the pool.

The room was in a twilight, and it took a moment to see its disorder. There were overflow-

ing ashtrays, dirty coffee cups and glasses. There was a half bottle of dead champagne on the bar. Marion Briggs was gone now; Bobo's house had lost its keeper.

The telephone's bell interrupted Bobo's dismal greeting to us. It was for Shirley and Claire; their husbands were collaborating on a call from Chicago. I gathered that their flight had been grounded by bad weather which looked temporary enough to make it inadvisable to come the rest of the way by train. You could tell, by listening to the two women on the phone, the wide difference in their marriages.

It wasn't hard to picture Shirley's comfortable and serene home in Westchester. You could imagine her husband and his two sons, who were already grown boys when she had married Malcolm Wharton, as just the family Shirley needed to make her happy.

Claire's marriage to Nicky Benedict was exactly the opposite. I didn't need to imagine what it was like; I knew from the New York columnists. Nicky was still the good-time boy he had been when he and Lenna's husband were pals. When he had time to work he was an unsuccessful artist. He and Claire lived their hectic, flamboyant, stormy romance in

public, in night clubs, theaters, bars.

When they tiffed, you read about it in your morning paper. When they reconciled, you read about it in the evening. But somehow the marriage had lasted, and I thought, as I listened to Claire say goodbye to Nicky, that I knew why. She was madly, deeply in love with her Nicky-boy.

It was Joyce Revere who was the romantic unfortunate of the *Watch Out!* girls. She had tried marriage twice, been divorced twice. Her first husband had been a film star, her second a tennis star. It seemed that Joyce might better stop making her marriages in heaven. At the moment she was matrimonially at liberty and from the rueful expression on her face as she listened to her friends take comfort from their husbands, she wasn't enjoying her liberty.

Claire and Shirley came back to the low-slung divan and sat on either side of Joyce. Bobo, sitting cross-legged on the floor, looked up at them and shook his head disconsolately.

"I've always wanted to meet your husband, Shirley," he said, "and I so want to see Nicky again. Well, now I will. Because some maniac has murdered Lenna and Zita and poor Marion Briggs."

It hadn't seemed to occur to



Bobo that the maniac might be one of the three young ladies who faced him across his coffee table, or the pitifully nerve-wracked girl in the room upstairs.

He sighed and said, "Yes, I'll see your husbands, and then I'll never see any of you again."

Joyce leaned toward him. "Darling, this will all be over soon. And next year we'll be back—the four of us will come back."

"You will?" Bobo asked wistfully.

"Of course," Claire said.

"Well," Bobo said, "it won't be to this house you'll come. I'll sell it or—or burn it." His voice rose. "I'll build a new beautiful place—" He stopped. "No," he said, "it can never be as it was again. Why has this happened? I remember the eight of you girls, so young and lovely, such wonderful futures ahead of you. Then first it was Lenna's tragedy, with Clyde's death. Then Dixie in the plane crash. Now this. Lenna and Zita, both of them at once."

Jeff said, "Bobo, when was the last time you were all together? Do you remember?"

"I wish I couldn't remember," Bobo said quietly. "It was at my picnic at Snedens Landing. I remember how it started out, so fine, so gay. Everyone loved my picture-con-

test idea; they all thought it was such fun. It was a wonderful party, and then it was a horrible one. Clyde disappearing and all of us hunting for him, getting more worried by the minute. And then finding him there at the foot of the cliff, that horrible cliff."

"Don't, Bobo, dear," Joyce said.

"Well, that was the last time we were all together. I only saw poor Dixie once or twice after that. And Janice sailed for South Africa with her new husband the next week, and of course I never saw her again. I half expected that—South Africa is so far away. But I did expect to see Lenna again, and I never did. My parties, because of my stupid parties—"

"Now, Bobo," Joyce said.

"It was because of one of my parties that Clyde died and Lenna's life was ruined. It was my doing. And Lenna was so happy, so much in love."

"Bobo, stop it!" Shirley said. "Stop talking that way. It isn't true. Lenna wasn't in love with Clyde."

There was a moment of absolute silence. Shirley's four friends stared at her with shocked incredulity.

It was Claire who spoke first. "Shirley, do you know what you're saying?"

"It's the truth," Shirley said.



Jeff moved closer to the big divan. "Shirley," he said, "nobody else seems to know this, or even to have suspected it. How can you know that Lenna wasn't in love with Clyde Halmont?"

"He told me. Yes," she added defiantly, "he did. I knew Clyde before any of the others did. I was the one who introduced him to the gang. He never had any romantic notions about me; we were friends. And just a few months after he'd married Lenna he came to me in one of his more sober moments. He was a very unhappy boy. He said that Lenna was putting on a sensational act of being the loving, devoted wife. But that's all it was—an act, a lie. She had no feeling for him at all, only for his money. He was bitter and wanted a divorce."

"But after his death," Claire said, "she went all to pieces. You know that, Shirley. She was heartbroken."

"I've never believed that," Shirley said. "I think that was an act, too."

"But to go to such lengths!" Bobo said. "To go into complete retirement as Lenna did! She gave up her friends, the life she loved, everything! Why, Shirley?"

"I don't know," Shirley said. "I've always wondered."

Joyce said slowly, "I saw Lenna just once after the accident. I've wondered about her, too. I thought that I could see more than grief in Lenna's behavior. I thought that she was—well, maybe frightened. She needed money, too, and I lent her some—several hundred dollars."

It was Bobo who voiced the surprise that this second bomb-shell concerning the life and love of Lenna MacLane created. He said, "Now, this is too much! I knew that Clyde was racing through his money, but there was something left. There must have been!"

"About forty thousand dollars," Jeff said.

"At least," Bobo said. "And you know how Lenna was living. She didn't go out, she didn't entertain, she lived so simply. Joyce, she couldn't have needed money!"

"She borrowed some from me," Joyce said doggedly, "and she didn't tell me why she needed it. She said something about a check being late. I knew that wasn't true, but I didn't press her. I felt that she was in some kind of trouble, and then, when she disappeared from New York so strangely, that proved me right."

"Yes," Bobo said slowly, "there was that. Lenna's leaving New York. That always puzzled

me. She loved New York, it was her town. I know how she struggled to get out of that dismal Pennsylvania place she grew up in. I thought she'd never want to leave New York."

"Maybe," Jeff said, "she didn't want to leave it. Maybe someone, or something, forced her into going."

"It could have been," Shirley said. "I only know it wasn't because of Clyde that she left. It wasn't because of him that New York became unbearable for her."

"So it was something else that drove her away," Jeff said. "Something that sent her into hiding all these years."

He walked slowly away from the group, skirted the edge of the pool, stopped, and stared down into the water. Bobo and the girls watched him tensely. When Saul Lansing asked his question from the doorway, I didn't know if anyone else could have answered it, but I thought I could.

"Troy," he said, "there's something on your mind. What is it?"

Jeff turned to the policeman. He said, "Lansing, a girl spends nearly forty thousand dollars in practically no time and no one can see what she's spent it on. A girl loves New York, it's the only place in the world for her. Yet she runs

away from it, goes into hiding. What does all that add up to?"

"The girl's Lenna MacLane?"

"Yes."

"I'd say that very possibly Lenna MacLane was being blackmailed."

"So would I," Jeff said. "The blackmailer took her for everything she had, but still hounded her. She borrowed money, tried to stay in New York, but at last she had to give up. She ran away from her blackmailer, hid from him."

"Yes," Lansing said. "It makes sense."

"And maybe," Jeff went on, "it answers another question. Why did Lenna decide to come to this party? And why did she do it in such a strange way, arriving in the middle of the night? Maybe she decided to come and get rid of her blackmailer—murder her. But instead—"

"Instead," Lansing said, "the blackmailer beat her to it? You might still be making sense, Troy."

"No!" Bobo exploded, and Lenna's three old friends echoed him.

"It's ridiculous!" Joyce said. "You have to have done something wrong to get yourself blackmailed! And Lenna, what could she ever have done?"

"Nothing!" Claire said.

"Of course, nothing!" Shirley said. "You're wrong, I know you are. What could she have done that gave someone the power to control her life?"

"Only she and that someone know," Lansing said. "But her life was being controlled. I agree with Troy." He was looking at Bobo now, frowning, thoughtful. "Mr. Wilton, was it you who told me about Lenna and Kendall Crane?"

"I think I may have mentioned it." Bobo was puzzled. "Why do you ask?"

"Bobo," Claire said, "what did you tell him about Lenna and Ken?"

"Why, only that when Lenna got her job in *Watch Out!* Ken was her beau. That was how we all met him."

"Were they engaged?" Lansing asked.

"No," Bobo said, "it never got that far."

"But they were in love with each other."

"I guess so," Bobo said.

Lansing turned to the girls. "What do you say about it?" he asked. "Were they in love with each other?"

Claire spoke up. "Yes, I guess they were. It was hard to tell about Lenna. She was never one to discuss her feelings. But we all expected that she and Ken—well, that it would last.

But it didn't. Suddenly it was over. Lenna ended it quick—bing!—like that."

"Didn't you ever wonder why?" Lansing asked.

"Yes, of course we wondered." Claire smiled grimly. "I can see you've never been in a show-girl dressing room. We used to discuss it all the time behind her back, but we didn't find an answer. Until she married Clyde."

"And then you thought she had given up Crane for Clyde Halmont. But maybe," Lansing said, "you were wrong. Maybe that was just another place where Lenna's life was being controlled. Maybe she was forced to give him up."

"But why?" Shirley asked. "Why would anyone do that to her?"

"Well," Lansing said, "right after Lenna dropped him, Kendall Crane got married. That seems a little strange, doesn't it? It happened pretty suddenly, didn't it?"

It was Joyce Revere who was the first to grasp the policeman's insinuation. "Are you saying," she asked incredulously, "that it was Betsy who forced Lenna to give up Kendall Crane?"

"It was Betsy who got him," Lansing said flatly. "She married him."

"But she'd always been

crazy about him," Joyce said. "Even when he was in love with Lenna. We all knew that, we all teased her."

"But," Lansing said, "she never stood a chance with him while Lenna was in the way. But with Lenna out of the way—"

"You can't be serious!" Joyce cried. "You can't be accusing Betsy of blackmail!"

He didn't bother to answer her. He turned abruptly to Jeff. "I want to talk to you, Troy." Together they left the room.

A few minutes later Jeff came back to tell me that he and Lansing were driving into Albuquerque. He had no time to explain. He hurried away and I went upstairs to my bedroom.

As the afternoon dragged on, my wondering about Betsy Crane became a desire to do something for her. Lansing, I knew, had the beginnings of a case against her. It was incredible that Betsy could be a cold, ruthless blackmailer, a brutal killer, but I knew of no way to prove to Lansing that she wasn't. When, from my bedroom window, I saw Kendall Crane striding miserably back and forth in the garden below me, I took for granted that Betsy was alone.

The sun was down; darkness had begun to settle in the

center of the house. I groped my way down the corridor to Betsy's room. I tapped twice on the door. There was no answer. I knocked again before I tried the door and found it open. Betsy was lying on her bed, her back to me.

I tiptoed to the foot of the bed. Her eyes were closed but I could see the lashes flutter.

The footsteps in the hall warned me, but I was still startled by the sharpness of Lansing's voice. Betsy was more startled than I. She sat straight up, her eyes wide and frightened as she looked at the policeman. He motioned Jeff into the room, closed the door. He switched on a light and came to Betsy's bed.

"Mrs. Crane," he said.

"Yes?"

"Before your husband married you," he said with cold bluntness, "he was in love with Lenna MacLane."

Betsy's lips trembled; she didn't speak.

"You were able to break up that romance."

"Oh, no! Lenna herself—"

"You had some information about Lenna MacLane that made her do whatever you wanted. You took Kendall Crane away from her. Later you took her money from her, drove her from New York, forced her into hiding."

"No!" Betsy cried. "Oh, why would I do that?"

"Because you knew," Lansing said, "that your husband still loved her."

Betsy put her face in her hands; she turned away from Lansing. His voice rose as he pounded at her. "Two days ago, in the afternoon, Lenna MacLane arrived in Albuquerque. Your husband learned about it and flew here at once to meet her."

"No!" Betsy said. "Ken didn't get here until yesterday, long after Lenna had been killed!"

"You know that isn't true, Mrs. Crane. Your husband arrived in Albuquerque the evening before the murder. He registered at the Hotel Scott, asked for Lenna MacLane. Somehow you found out about it—"

"No," Betsy sobbed.

The policeman shook his head. "You knew, Mrs. Crane. And Lenna MacLane realized when she got here that she was in danger; she tried to run away. Someone followed her, probably in a car, and killed her."

He waited until Betsy's sobs had quieted. He spoke softly, but with no gentleness. "All right, Mrs. Crane. You used the convertible. What time did you use it? And why?"

"I told you. I only went for a ride! And it was just after one o'clock, long before Lenna got here."

"Betsy," Jeff said, "did you know that Ken was in Albuquerque?"

She looked at him for a moment, then she spoke directly to him, "Yes, I knew. Ken telephoned me from home, just to say hello, to see if I was having fun. It was right after Bobo had told us that Lenna was coming. Zita answered the phone. She told Ken that Lenna was in Albuquerque, that she was coming here."

Lansing said, "You wouldn't have told him that, would you, Mrs. Crane?"

Betsy said dully, "No, I wouldn't have told him."

"But he knew," Lansing went on. "And then?"

"I phoned Ken later to say good night. He wasn't home. Our housekeeper said that he had left suddenly on a business trip. She didn't know where."

"You didn't believe that," Lansing said.

She was still talking to Jeff, not looking at the policeman. "I was afraid I knew where Ken had gone. I called the Hotel Scott. He was registered there. I didn't talk to him. I—I just hung up."

"You thought he was with Lenna MacLane."

"Yes, I thought he was with her. I must have gone out of my mind then. I got into the convertible; I started for Albuquerque. And then, when I got as far as the highway, I came to my senses. I couldn't have stood seeing them together, even if I'd been able to find them. I turned around and came back to the house. I never saw Lenna."

"Why did you lie, then, about using the car?"

She turned to him at last. "Oh, don't you see? Can't you understand? I couldn't let Ken know that I was still jealous, that I still didn't trust him! If he loved me at all, he would stop if he knew how horribly I'd acted!"

"All right," Lansing said. "I've heard your story, Mrs. Crane. Now I'd like some more important people than me to hear it. I want you to come to the barracks with me."

"You're arresting me," Betsy said numbly. "You think that I killed Lenna. You think I killed Zita and—and Marion Briggs. No—oh, no!"

"I want you to come with me," Lansing repeated. "I'll give you ten minutes to dress."

Jeff and I followed the policeman out into the hall and down the steps. There was only one person in the big living

room. Ken Crane stood at the bar, pouring himself a brandy.

Lansing flicked a look at Jeff that meant he would handle this alone. He sat down at the bar beside Ken. When Ken pushed the bottle toward him, Lansing stopped it halfway. He said, "Did you see Lenna MacLane in Albuquerque the other night?"

Ken's eyes lowered to the glass before him. He picked it up and drained it. He said, "So you know about that."

"Did you see her?" Lansing said again.

"No, I didn't find her. She wasn't registered at the hotel." He looked up at Lansing, his face grim. "Does Betsy know about this?"

"She's known about it since the beginning. She suspected it and phoned the Hotel Scott. She found out you were there."

Kendall Crane groaned softly. "So that was it. That's what's been the matter with Betsy."

"Couldn't you have figured it out?"

Ken rubbed his fingertips across his forehead. "I was afraid that was it. But Lenna is somebody Betsy and I never discuss. It's always been like that."

"I can believe that," Lansing said. "You've always been in love with her."

"No," Crane said. "I got over Lenna before I married Betsy. Completely over her."

"But you've kept on seeing her."

"In the last nine years, since she left New York, I've seen her only once."

"When?"

"About three years ago. I met her accidentally in a hotel bar in Chicago. I don't believe I'd have known her if I hadn't heard her speak to the waiter. There was hardly a trace of the old Lenna—her beauty was almost entirely gone. She was unkempt and—and shabby. I tried to help her, to give her money. She refused it. She turned and walked away from me. I knew that she hated having us meet, and it broke my heart, seeing her like that. Lenna, of all people."

Lansing said, "Marion Briggs saw her the night before she was murdered. Claire Benedict saw her, too, for just a moment. They said she was beautiful, as beautiful as ever."

Kendall Crane shook his head. "She was pitiful when I saw her last."

Lansing said, "All right. She'd lost her looks and you no longer loved her. But you wanted to see her again."

"I was worried about her."

"The way you'd worry about any old friend?"

"Any old friend like Lenna." He looked sharply at Lansing. "You don't believe me? You think there was still something between Lenna and me?"

Lansing didn't answer his question. Instead he said, "Did you tell your wife that you'd seen her in Chicago?"

"I hadn't meant to tell her. But inadvertently I said something. She knew."

"And it upset her."

Crane nodded.

"And, of course, that's why you tried to see Lenna this time without your wife knowing. You were afraid this would make her unhappy."

"Yes. I didn't want to hurt Betsy; I'd do anything rather than that. I happen to love her very much. I was only a kid when I met Lenna and she took me by storm. But Betsy, she's never really understood that."

"All right," Lansing said. "Lenna MacLane meant nothing to you. But you did fly down to Albuquerque to try and find her."

"She still meant enough to me to want to help her if I could. I never forgot how she looked when I last saw her. You don't want anyone you were ever fond of to be as miserable as that."

Lansing said slowly, "You know, Crane, I believe you. But your wife—she believes you

were still in love with Lenna."

"She's afraid that I was."

"And she's a very jealous young lady," Lansing said. "Violently jealous, I'd say."

Kendall Crane looked at him with incredulous horror. "You think—you think she murdered Lenna because of me!"

"I'm taking her down to the barracks."

Crane was on his feet, shouting at the policeman. "You—you're insane! Where is Betsy now?"

"Upstairs. In her room."

"I'm going to see her!"

"Sure; go ahead, kid. Take five minutes. Then bring her downstairs with you."

Ken ran the length of the living room, leaped across the corner of the pool. I heard him pound through the hall and up the stairs.

Lansing shook his head. He poured some brandy into a glass and drank it down. He looked at his watch. He was still looking at it when we heard Ken shouting upstairs.

In a second we were out in the hall. Ken was racing down the stairs toward us. His voice was wild. "She's gone—Betsy's gone!"

He rushed on past us, through the arch, toward the patio of the mission. The others in the house were pouring into the hallway. Joyce and Shirley

came down the stairs, Bobo Wilton behind them. We heard a car's engine roar into gear as Kendall Crane took off after his wife. Lansing shook his head at the sound.

"She couldn't have gone outside," he said, "without one of my men seeing her."

"She didn't go outside," a voice said.

We all turned. Across the circle of the hall Claire Benedict stood in the library doorway.

Lansing moved quickly toward her. "Did you see Mrs. Crane?" he snapped.

"Yes. She was here in the library when I came in about five minutes ago."

"Where did she go?"

Claire's face was suddenly frightened. "Why?" she asked. "What's happened to Betsy?"

"Until now I wasn't sure," Lansing said. "But this running away proves it. She's wanted for murder. What was she doing in the library?"

Behind me I heard the short gasp of fright. Then Bobo Wilton was brushing by me, running across the library to the big desk that stood beside the window. One of its drawers was standing partly open, and Bobo's hands were shaking as he wrenched it all the way out. He groped for a moment inside it. Then he wheeled around to face us.



"My gun," he said. "There was a gun in that drawer."

Lansing's voice slashed across Bobo's like a razor. "Did you see Betsy Crane at that desk, Mrs. Benedict?"

"She was just leaving the room when I came in. I didn't know what she'd been doing."

"You didn't see her with a gun?"

"No. She had nothing in her hands. I—" Claire's words stopped suddenly. "I—I'm wrong. She had a jacket thrown over one arm. There could have been a gun—"

"Where did she go, Mrs. Benedict?"

"Through that archway into the mission," Claire said. Her voice was numb, toneless. "She turned left. She didn't go through to the patio. She was heading for the wing with all the monks' cells."

With sleight-of-hand rapidity the policeman was holding a gun. He whirled toward the door, but Claire Benedict caught at his arm and held it.

"You're not going after her, are you?" she whispered. "You know why she's taken that gun. You've frightened her, terrified her. She means to kill herself. And if you go in there—with that gun—"

"What do you want me to do, Mrs. Benedict?"

"Let one of us go to her!

She's not afraid of us. We could talk to her; we could reason with her."

"She's got a gun," Lansing said. "You think she means to use it on herself. But if she changes her mind—"

"No!" Shirley's voice trembled as she stepped up beside Claire, but her eyes were flashing. "I'm not afraid—none of us is afraid. Any one of us will go and talk to Betsy. You may be wrong about her still; she may be innocent. You've got to let one of us go to her."

The policeman hesitated, his face wracked with indecision as he glanced at the circle of people surrounding him. The eyes of the girls and Bobo Wilton were fixed on him in wordless pleading.

Claire stepped closer to him. "Let me go," she said. "Give Betsy this chance. If you go and she—she hurts herself—"

"All right," Lansing said. "All right, Mrs. Benedict. I'll give you ten minutes."

The smile Claire managed was pitifully feeble, but she smiled. We watched her as she crossed the wide circle of hall and passed through the arch, then turned left into the wing of the old mission that held the honeycomb of friars' cells.

Lansing looked at his watch and all of us turned, as if controlled by some unseen

machine, to face the big clock on the fireplace mantel. Suddenly its ticking was audible, loud and slow and ominous.

We waited, hardly breathing. The echo of Claire's footsteps on the stone floor had died away and there was no sound now but the ticking of the clock. An eternity passed, and yet; by the hands of the clock, not even a minute had gone by.

It was Joyce who broke the deathly hush. "She may not find her," she said. "Maybe Betsy isn't in there now. Maybe she only went through that wing and out of it."

"No," Bobo said quietly. "Not out of that part of the mission. There is no way out."

Jeff said, "There must be some way."

"No," Bobo said again.

"Whoever it was that attacked Marion Briggs," Jeff said, "went into that part of the mission. And there was no one there when I looked. Somehow he got out."

"Betsy Crane won't get out of there," Lansing said. "Wilton is right, Troy. My men have been over that building. There's only one way out of that wing—this way."

"But the person who frightened Marion Briggs," Jeff said, "went into that wing. She said he had. Yet there was no one there." He stopped. "But

Marion Briggs was frightened. That scream was real, she was terrified. But what was it, what frightened her?"

They weren't listening. All of them had turned back to the doorway again, their eyes piercing the mission arch, their ears filled with the sound of a ticking clock.

"It was during the storm that she screamed," Jeff said, and there was a look in his eyes that startled me. "The storm—"

I remembered the storm, the sudden blackness of it, the slashing rain, the girls laughing in the brightness of the big room. They'd all been talking about it—about Lenna MacLane's horror of thunder and lightning. Maybe that was all that had frightened Marion Briggs; maybe she, like Lenna, had had a fear of storms. But she wouldn't have lied about it. She wouldn't have invented a person who attacked her unless—

I looked at Jeff again, and I knew what he was thinking.

"Jeff," I said, "Lenna was afraid—"

"Yes," he said. "She would have been able to change her voice, her face, everything. Everything but her phobia, her fear of a storm. She couldn't have changed that. She couldn't have kept herself from screaming when that terrific flash of

lightning hit near her. So she would have lied about it. She could have said someone attacked her."

The insistence of Jeff's voice demanded their attention. One by one the people in the room turned to him.

"And Zita could have found out," he said. "Somehow, she could have realized the truth. She would know that the body lying in the mission, waiting for the ambulance, was Lenna's body. And somehow, even with the face all battered in, she could have known that Marion Briggs was Lenna MacLane."

They were all looking at Jeff now, looking at him as though they had heard the words of a madman chattering nonsense.

Bobo Wilton was the first to speak. "No!" he cried. "I would have known Lenna! All the months that Marion Briggs was here I would have known."

"You hadn't seen Lenna for ten years. You remembered her as a gorgeous, glamorous youngster, not a dowdy, fat woman in her thirties. She tried out her disguise on you, and you didn't know her. And the rest of you—none of you ever looked at Marion Briggs. She was Bobo's housekeeper, a piece of furniture. That was the way she made it."

"But it was Lenna who phoned me!" Bobo said. "I

knew her voice at once! She didn't even have to tell me who it was!"

"She dropped her Marion Briggs role for that call. She was an actress, remember. For that call she became Lenna again, using Lenna's voice. She did it once more, late in the night, when Joyce heard Lenna's laugh."

He turned to me. "It was you, Haila, that Marion Briggs awakened in the night. She told you about bringing Lenna back. You didn't know Lenna. There was no danger of your rushing in to see her and discovering that there was no one there."

"But she was here!" Bobo cried. "Claire saw her that morning, leaving the house! Claire told us how beautiful she still was; she told us what she was wearing."

I saw the look that shot between Lansing and Jeff, the flash of stunned realization, before both of them were racing through the arch into the mission.

Shirley said, "What is it? Why are they—?"

"It's Claire," I said. "Claire murdered Lenna and Zita."

"Claire!"

"Yes. And she tricked us into letting her go to Betsy. She has the gun, not Betsy." I kept my voice low; I was listening for a shot, a shot that would

mean Lansing and Jeff had been too late. "She's going to kill Betsy now. We're supposed to think that it was suicide, that Betsy killed herself because she was guilty."

"Claire killed Lenna and Zita," Bobo whispered, "and now—"

It was quiet again; we were waiting. In a crumbling, dusty cell in the mission was a girl who had, somehow, been tricked into going there by a murderess. She was waiting for the murderess, probably waiting for her to keep her promise to help her.

But the murderess had a gun. This instant she might be lifting that gun to Betsy's head. Claire would only have to wipe her prints from the gun and thrust it into Betsy's still hand.

If the two men weren't in time, Betsy would be dead. And somewhere, out on the highway, Kendall Crane was frantically searching for the wife he loved.

The quiet was broken by the distant shuffle of footsteps on stone. Slowly they came toward us. Then Jeff moved into the arch. In his arms lay Betsy.

"She's all right," he said. "She isn't hurt."

As he carried her up the stairs I caught a glimpse of moving figures through the archway. I turned quickly, and

followed Jeff up the steps. I didn't want to see Claire Benedict as Lansing dragged her from the house to book her for the murder of her two old friends.

I watched Jeff shake hands with Saul Lansing in the doorway of the police barracks. He climbed into the back seat of the car beside me. Our driver, one of Lansing's men, started the car toward Albuquerque. Our week-end at Bobo Wilton's was over.

At this moment Bobo was closing up his house; he was moving to Santa Fe. This morning, early, Betsy and Ken Crane had left for home and a life that these three ghastly days had shattered, then ironically mended and made more secure for the two of them.

Joyce Revere was already back in Hollywood. At the Albuquerque airport Shirley was waiting for her husband. And a policeman was waiting for that plane, to tell Nicky Benedict that his wife was a blackmailer who had killed her victim, then killed Zita Allen in an attempt to conceal her crime.

"Jeff," I said, "I hope you didn't have to see Claire."

"No," Jeff said. "She confessed. Lansing let me read her statement."

"Why was she blackmailing Lenna? Was it something about the accident that killed Lenna's husband?"

"So you've guessed that, too. Yes, rather than let Clyde Halmont divorce her, Lenna murdered him. And Claire saw her do it. She'd wandered away from the picnic that day and she saw Lenna and Clyde at the top of the cliff. She'd thought it would make a pretty picture, the two of them silhouetted.

"But when she raised her camera to take the shot, it wasn't a pretty picture. They were struggling. It wasn't much of a struggle, Clyde was very drunk, but that's the picture Claire got—just a moment before Lenna managed to push him off the cliff. And it was with that picture she was able to blackmail her old friend."

"A lovely duo, Lenna and Claire."

"Well, at least Claire was capable of loving somebody. She loved her Nicky. Unfortunately he's a gigolo-type kiddo. He wanted a wife who would make life easy for him, and very gay. That takes money. And Claire loved him so much she'd do anything to get him that money, even to running such a dangerous risk as to blackmail Lenna MacLane."

"She did know how dangerous it was, didn't she?"

"Sure. Lenna had killed to get the Halmont money, so she'd kill again to keep it. But Claire worked out an elaborate, foolproof way to collect anonymously. She rented a locker at Grand Central, had a duplicate key made, sent it to Lenna with instructions. Lenna was to leave forty thousand dollars in that locker at a certain time, then take a train to Stamford, register at a certain hotel there. Then Claire checked with a phone call, making sure that Lenna was there. Now she knew it was safe for her to collect the money. Lenna couldn't possibly be watching her or the locker; Lenna was miles away. It worked fine."

"And so she tried it again?"

"Right. Only, the next time Lenna apparently couldn't raise the dough. So she ran away, still not knowing who her enemy was, only that it was one of the *Watch Out!* girls."

"Jeff, think of the torture she must have suffered all these years! Roaming the country, hiding, trying to figure out who her blackmailer was."

"And getting more desperate as time went on," Jeff said. "The Halmont money, the million and a half, would be due soon. She knew that the moment she collected it, her blackmailer would start after her again. So before that she

had to murder her blackmailer—if she could find out who it was. As Lenna MacLane she had failed to do that; but maybe as a stranger—”

“And so she became Marion Briggs.”

Jeff nodded. “I think the idea must have come to her when she saw Ken Crane in Chicago, and he hardly recognized her. She must have realized how much she’d changed unintentionally. So if she put her mind to it—Well, she did just that. She became Marion Briggs and no one—not Bobo nor any of the girls—saw through her disguise.”

“And then she set her trap to catch her blackmailer,” I said.

“Right, Haila, and she did it cleverly. She fixed it so Lenna was supposed to arrive in the middle of the night, leave the next morning. That gave the blackmailer only a few hours to do her work. And, as Marion Briggs, she would be watching the room Lenna was supposedly in every minute of those hours.

“From there on, we know exactly what happened; it’s in Claire’s statement. Claire heard Lenna’s laugh, just as Joyce had. She knew that she had arrived. After the house was quiet, she went to Lenna’s room. She was as cautious as ever; she made sure this was no

trap. She made sure that Lenna wasn’t watching her from a closet or through a keyhole. And when she knew she was safe, she slipped a note under Lenna’s door.”

“But then,” I said, “she discovered that Marion Briggs had seen her.”

“She met Marion in the hall. Marion pretended that she was just checking up on the house, doing her duty as housekeeper; but there was something about her, a look of triumph in her eyes, that made Claire realize the whole truth. She knew that Marion Briggs was Lenna and that the whole thing *had* been a trap.”

“And then? Did Lenna try to kill her?” I asked.

“No, that apparently wasn’t her plan. I figure that she meant to kill her later, probably follow her back to New York to murder her there. Then she would have vanished and Marion Briggs would be no more. And in two years Lenna would appear to claim her inheritance.”

“Jeff, if Lenna’s plan had succeeded, how would she, as Marion Briggs, have explained that Lenna was missing the next morning?”

“Probably the same way that Claire did. She could say that Lenna had told her she couldn’t bear seeing her old friends and

had slipped away. No crime would have been committed, so nobody would have questioned that."

"But her plan didn't succeed because Claire recognized her."

"And Claire knew that she meant to kill her sometime," Jeff added. "So Claire had to kill or be killed."

"Then Claire did some fast thinking," I said. "Bright girl, Claire."

"Very bright. She killed Lenna, dragged her into the room where Lenna was supposed to have been, and bashed in her face so she wouldn't be identified as anyone but poor Marion Briggs. Then she told us her story about seeing Lenna sneak away. She was clever about that, too."

"She seemed to be protecting her old friend, but she made her point. The police began looking for Lenna MacLane, a murderess."

"And this murderess the police were looking for," I said, "was actually the victim."

"And Claire was safe," Jeff said, "until Zita got wise. She must have got the idea that Marion Briggs was Lenna the same way we did—the storm phobia. She went to the mission and looked at Marion's body. Do you remember the girls talking about an accident Lenna once had backstage?"

"Yes, I remember. She cut her leg and she'd been so brave about the stitches."

"That's it. On Marion Briggs' knee there was a scar, and Zita recognized that scar. It was proof that the body was Lenna MacLane. Zita tried to tell us that over the phone, but Claire stopped her. Claire was getting pretty good at that sort of thing."

"And then Betsy. She was going to kill Betsy," I said.

"And that, she hoped, would close the case forever. She found Betsy in such a hysterical state because Lansing suspected her that she'd listen to anyone, do anything. It wasn't hard for Claire to convince her that she had to run away. She got her to hide in the mission, promising that she'd come to her, help her get away."

"Then she went to get Bobo's gun. She meant to meet Betsy, all right—and murder her. And it would have closed the case. She would have made Betsy's death seem a suicide, an admission of guilt. But we spoiled that plan by meeting Claire in the library before she had a chance to get to Betsy."

"But even then she didn't give up. Getting all of us to wait there while she went into the mission after Betsy—to murder her. She certainly kept her wits about her."

"But in the end she outwitted herself. As soon as we knew that Marion Briggs was Lenna, we knew Claire was guilty. She said she had seen Lenna, as beautiful as ever. That was the lie that trapped her."

"It goes to show," I said, "you shouldn't flatter people."

"Right, Haila. Never flatter anyone."

"Except your wife. Flatter me, Jeff; I could use a little.

After all this I feel old and gray."

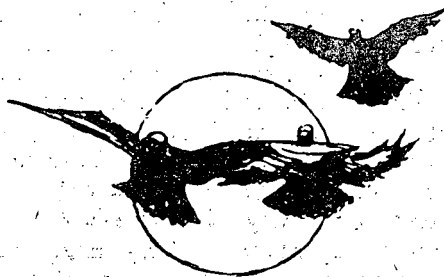
"Okay," Jeff said, "I'll flatter you." He waved his hand at the window. "See all that scenery? The majestic, multi-colored mountains reaching up through the blue air toward the golden sun?"

"Yes, Jeff."

"Well, you're much nicer-looking."

"Thank you, Jeff."

"You're welcome, Haila."





# Robert L. Fish

## Adventure of the Disappearance of Whistler's Mother

*Well, well, well! We suppose it had to happen eventually—so why not now? That famous detective—Monsieur C. Septembre Duping, no less!—calls upon Schlock Homes to help solve the most baffling disappearance in the history of crime, and The Great Defective—pardon, The Great Detective—truly outdoes himself, if that's possible . . . a Mt. Neverest in Schlock Homes's criminological career . . .*

### Detective: SCHLOCK HOMES

It was seldom, indeed, that the successful conclusion of a case left my friend, Mr. Schlock Homes, dissatisfied and unhappy; but one such affair did occur in the latter part of '66, and I relate the case to demonstrate how the best intentions of the finest of men can at times lead to unwanted results.

The months preceding this particular affair had been busy ones, and reference to my case-book for that period reveals numerous examples in which his analytical genius was given full opportunity for expression. There was, for example, his brilliant solution to the strange affair of the American baseball manager who went berserk,

which I find noted as *The Adventure of the Twisted Lip*; and shortly thereafter his attention was drawn to the mysterious curse placed on the south forty of a local grange owned by a prominent manufacturer of stomach drugs. I am sure my readers will recognize the case, which I later delineated as *The Adventure of the Bane in the Lower Tract*.

One might reasonably have imagined, this being so, that when at long last a dropping off of activity afforded my friend a well-needed chance for rest he would have been pleased; but such was not the case. Boredom was always distasteful to Homes, and I was not surprised,

therefore, to return to our quarters at 221B Bagel Street one late, blustery afternoon in October to find my friend, hands thrust deep into the pockets of his dressing-gown, sprawled out in a chair before the fireplace, glowering fiercely into the flames.

Nor did he greet me in his customary manner, but came to his feet at my entrance and moved to the window restlessly, scowling down at the pavement.

I set aside my bag, removed my greatcoat and bowler, and was just turning to the side-board, when a sharp ejaculation caused me to swing about and contemplate Homes. He was leaning forward, staring down at the street in sudden excitement, his entire attitude expressing inordinate interest.

"Homes!" I exclaimed. "What is it?"

"Come here, Watney," said he, and drew the curtains further apart as I obediently hurried to his side. His thin finger pointed downward, quivering with excitement. "What do you make of that poor fellow there? Harrowed, is he not?"

My glance followed the direction of his finger. The figure to which Homes was referring was dashing madly from one side of the street to the other, studying the numerals of the houses in obvious agitation.

Despite the dank chill of the day he wore neither cape nor beaver; his hair was tousled, his waistcoat awry, and his manner extremely disturbed.

"Harrowed?" I repeated wonderingly, watching the eccentric path woven by the man below. "In my opinion, medically speaking, he appears not so much harrowed as ploughed."

"No matter," Homes replied with barely-concealed triumph. "The important fact is that he is coming to visit us, for you will note he has paused before our doorstep, and even now is entering. And here, if I am not mistaken, is our visitor now."

Homes was, as usual, correct, for there was the sound of footsteps pounding loudly on the stairs, and a moment later the door burst open. The disheveled man stood panting upon the threshold, casting his eyes about wildly until they lit on Homes.

"Schlock 'Omes!" he cried in a thick French accent. "Thank *le bon Dieu* I 'ave found you in!"

At closer sight of our visitor, Homes's eyes widened in sudden recognition. He hurried forward, taking our perturbed guest by the arm and leading him to an easy chair beside the fireplace.

"Duping!" he cried. "My

Lord, man, what is the trouble? What brings you to London? And in this sorry state?" He turned to me, his eyes glowing. "Watney, this is none other than my old friend from Paris, Monsieur C. Septembre Duping! You may recall that back in '41 I was able to be of some slight assistance to him in that sinister business of the simian with the inclination for strangling women and stuffing them up chimneys."

"Of course," I replied warmly, my eyes fixed upon our famous visitor with admiration. "As I recall, I even recorded the case in my notes as *The Adventure of the Monk's Habit*."

"Precisely," Homes agreed, and swung back to our guest, dropping into a chair across from him and leaning forward sympathetically. "Septembre, pray tell us what is bothering you."

The man seated facing him took a deep breath and then nodded. The warmth of the room after the raw weather outdoors had obviously done much to relax him, as well as the fact that I had hastened to furnish him with a whisky, taking one myself to keep him company.

"Yais," he said heavily, and raised troubled eyes to my friend's face. "'Omes, a terrible

thing 'as 'appened. I know you are too *occupe* to come to Paris, but I still wished for ze benefit of your analytical brain."

"Of course," Homes replied warmly. "What is the problem?"

Our guest laid aside his empty glass and hesitated a moment, as if to emphasize the extreme gravity of the matter. When at last he spoke, the very quietness of his tone impressed us with his seriousness.

"'Omes," he said slowly, "*Whistler's Mother 'as been stolen!*"

If he had expected any great reaction from Homes, he was surely disappointed, for other than a slight narrowing of his eyes, caused by a puff of smoke from the fireplace, my friend's face remained impassive. "Ah? Most interesting. Pray continue."

"Yais." Duping sighed deeply, and then plunged ahead. "Well, ze facts are zese. *Hier*, at ze Louvre, zey 'ave a *reception* for a new painter 'oo is visiting Paris, and to make ze affair properly impressive, zey arrange it in ze form of a musical *soiree*, calling ze programme 'Ello, Dali.' I mention zis fact only to explain why zere was so unusual-large a crowd zere; how you say, *normalment* at zis hour ze Louvre is quite empty.

Well, to make a long story court, at nine o'clock, when ze *musicale* is start, Whistler's Mother is zere, where she 'as been for years. At ten o'clock, when everybody leave—"He spread his hands. "Gone! Wiz-out a clew!"

Homes nodded, his eyes fixed on the other's unhappy expression. "I see."

"Yais. Well, I imagine you will want ze description." Our visitor thought a moment, assembling the data in his mind, and then continued. "A black background, and grey. 'Er size, in your English measurements, *approximativement* five-foot-four by four-foot-nine. As you can well understand, a 'eavy frame, of course. What else? Ah, yais—ze age. About ninety-five years, I believe." He shook his head sadly. "Let us 'ope she is in good condition when returned, and not damaged or smashed."

Homes nodded and sprang to his feet, beginning to pace the room, his thin hands clasped tightly behind his back. After several turns he came to stand before our guest, staring down with a frown on his face. "And has a reward been offered?"

Duping shrugged. "Money is no object, 'Omes. We will pay anyzing for ze return." He also rose, moving in the direction of the doorway. "We 'ave ze sus-

picion zat Whistler's Mother may already 'ave been smuggled out of France, possible 'ere to England."

"A natural conclusion," Homes agreed. "And where are you staying in London?"

"I do not stay. I return at once to Paris. I came only to ask your 'elp."

"And you shall have it! You may expect to hear from me quite soon, giving you my solution to this puzzle. I shall get right to it this very evening, my dear Septembre."

"But, 'Omes—I mean, Homes," I interrupted in disappointment. "You have forgotten. We have tickets for Albert Hall to-night. The Rome Flood-Control Chorus is doing 'Hold That Tiber'."

He waved aside my objection almost impatiently. "Duty before pleasure, Watney," he replied a bit coldly. "Besides, I am not particularly interested in a programme consisting solely of popular tunes."

"But there is also classical music," I insisted, a bit stung by his tone. "Cyd Caesar is completing the programme by playing the 'Etude Brutus'."

Homes thought a moment and then shook his head. "In that case it is a pity, but I have already given my word." He returned his attention to our guest. "One last question. Sep-

tembre," he said softly, staring at the other intently. "And once the return is effected—?"

"We shall 'ang 'er, of course," Duping replied simply, and closed the door behind him.

No sooner had our guest left than Homes flung himself back into his chair, tenting his fingers, and staring across them towards me with a dark frown on his hawklike features.

"A tragedy, is it not, Watney?"

"Indeed it is," I readily agreed. "An old woman kidnapped!"

"No, no!" He shook his head at me impatiently. "You missed the entire point! The tragedy is that a poor wine-stewardess in a night club should face such a penalty for the mere pilfering of several bottles of wine. Particularly since the poor soul was under the influence at the time and scarcely liable for her actions."

"I beg your pardon?" I asked, bewildered. "I heard nothing to-day of night-clubs or wine-stewardesses. In fact, with the small amount of information Monsieur Duping furnished, I do not see how you can possibly hope to come up with any answer to the puzzle."

"Small amount of information? Really, Watney, at times I

despair of you! Duping gave us more information than we really needed. For example, there was his description of the woman. Obviously, if she is five-foot-four by four-foot-nine, there was no need to inform us that she has a heavy frame. Similarly, if they plan to hang her when and if they get her back, it was scarcely necessary to tell us that her background was black. And being ninety-five years of age, one could automatically assume she would be grey. No, no, Watney! Duping gave us all we require. The real problem is how to handle it."

He swung about and stared fiercely into the flames of the fireplace, speaking almost as if to himself.

"There is a possibility, of course, that we can not only satisfy Duping but still save the poor old lady's life. If only—" He nodded to himself several times, and then turned around to face the room, glancing at his time-piece. "A bit early to make our move, though."

"Really, Homes," I said, deeply annoyed. "I honestly believe you are pulling my leg. That business before of wine-stewardesses and night clubs! And now this mysterious muttering you are indulging in! What move, pray, is it too early to make?"

"Why," Homes replied, surprised, "to break into Professor Marty's digs, of course." He noted the expression on my face and suddenly smiled in a kindly fashion. "No, Watney, I am not teasing you. We have at least an hour to spare, so let me explain this sad case to you."

He leaned in my direction, ticking his points off methodically on his fingers.

"Let us start with Duping's description of the place where the old lady was last seen, and from which she disappeared, this place called the Louvre—or, in English, The Louver. That the place is a night club is instantly discernible: the fact that normally it was deserted between the hours of nine and ten, long before the most frivolous of French patrons would think of beginning their evening's entertainment, the presence of music in the form of this 'Hello, Dali' revue; and most important, the name, so typical, and so similar to The Venetian Blind or The Window or The Cellar or others which we know to be so popular in Soho to-day. I should not hesitate to predict that their decor consists of louvers painted in green against a puce background. But no matter—let us continue."

A second finger was bent over to join the first, while I

listened in open-mouthed wonder to his brilliant deductions.

"Now, precisely what was this elderly lady doing in this night club? Obviously, she was not merely an habitue. Duping's exact words were, 'Where she 'as been for years.' Had she been a client, even the most constant, he almost certainly would have worded it differently. He would have said, 'Where she 'as been in ze 'abit of dropping in for years,' or something of that nature. Therefore, not being a client, we are forced to the conclusion that she is—or was, rather—an employee of the establishment, and one of long standing, at that.

"But in what position?" He shrugged before continuing. "Well, considering her age and her measurements, I believe we can safely eliminate the positions of waitress and hat-check girl, both of which demand a certain degree of beauty. Matron in the Mesdames? Again, I believe we can disregard this possibility; her exact presence or absence at any particular hour would scarcely have been noted with the exactitude that Duping indicated. And the same holds true, of course, for any of the kitchen staff. Cashier? With her black background it is doubtful

if the owners would permit her near the till. There is, therefore, only one position left: Mrs. Whistler could only have been the wine-stewardess!"

A third finger was depressed as I listened, amazed, to this startling demonstration of incontrovertible logic. Homes's eyes remained half-closed as he continued to clothe the thin facts given by his friend with the warm flesh of his impeccable analysis.

"Now, Watney, consider: How could an old lady like this manage to subject herself to a penalty as severe as hanging in the short period allowed her between the hours of nine and ten? Certainly her crime was not murder, for which the French still maintain the guillotine. It must therefore have been something equally severe in the eyes of her accusers, but short of murder. It must also, of necessity, be something within her power to perform. Recalling that her position was that of a wine-stewardess, and that she had no access to any of the funds of the club, we can only reach one conclusion: that her crime consisted of taking some of the wine stocks. Undoubtedly rare and precious, and therefore probably cognac."

"But, Homes!" I objected. "Hanging? Just for stealing a

few bottles of wine?"

He smiled at me pityingly. "It is apparent you know little of human nature, Watney. In the American colonies, as I am sure you are aware, the penalty for stealing a horse is hanging. And not so long ago punishment even more severe was reserved for anyone taking the King's deer. Why should France, where their national pride in their liqueurs is paramount, feel any less strongly? No, no! It is the only conclusion consistent with all the facts, and therefore must be the correct one. You know my dictum: when all theories but one have been eliminated, that remaining theory, however improbable—indeed, however impossible—must be the truth—or words to that effect."

I nodded dumbly. "Now," Homes went on, "when Duping told us that she had been stolen, you assumed his poor English prevented him from using the word 'kidnapped.' Actually, his poor English prevented him from stating what he truly meant—not that she had been stolen, but that she, herself, had stolen something."

I could not help but accept the faultless conclusion. "But, Homes," I said hopefully, "you suggest there were mitigating circumstances?"



"Yes. As I have already said, the poor woman was obviously under the influence of alcohol. You may recall Duping stating that he hoped she would not be 'smashed' when apprehended. It is an American slang term apparently becoming popular even in France. In any event, his very fear of this indicates that she stole the bottles in order to drink them—proof positive that her excessive thirst caused her crime in the first place. That she chose a moment when everyone was concentrating on the revue is easily understood. Under normal conditions she would have been too busy serving customers to have succumbed to the temptation to imbibe."

"But you say you hope to be able not only to satisfy Duping but also save the old lady?"

"There is that possibility."

"And this somehow involves Professor Marty?"

"Exactly." He considered me sombrely. "It will mean a bit of a risk to-night, but there is nothing else for it. If you do not care to join me in this venture, I shall not hold it against you. The Professor is undoubtedly the most dangerous man in all England."

"Nothing on earth could stop me from accompanying you, Homes!" I declared stoutly, and then frowned.

"But where does Professor Marty come into this at all?"

He shook his head impatiently at my lack of perception. "Please, Watney! You may recall that when Duping suggested the old lady might even now be in England, I readily agreed. Why? Because the name Whistler is certainly not French, but rather British, and in times of trouble to whom would she turn, if not to her son in England? We can scarcely believe that with her black background her son is free of a taint of malfeasance, and no criminal in England is beyond the scope or knowledge of Professor Marty. No, no! If Whistler's mother is in England at the moment, you may be sure the Professor is well aware of it. By entering his rooms after he has left on his nightly foray against society, I hope to find proof of the fact. And possibly turn it to the advantage of that poor soul!"

"Bravo, Homes!" I cried, and could not help applauding both his motives and his infallible logic. Unfortunately, at the moment I was holding both a glass and a bottle, and while I shame-facedly hastened to clear up the debris, Homes disappeared into his room to change into more suitable raiment.

It was past the hour of ten



when our hansom dropped us around the corner of Professor Marty's darkened rooms in Limehouse. The night had turned cold, which afforded us a good excuse to keep our collars high and our faces hidden from the denizens of the district, who slunk past us to fade into the growing miasma rising from the river beyond. With a glance in both directions, Homes chose a moment when a swirl of fog momentarily hid us from any passers-by to swiftly mount the steps and apply his skill to the lock. A moment later he was beckoning me to follow; scant seconds more and he had closed the door, and his bull's-eye lantern was casting its restricted beam about the empty room.

"Quickly, Watney!" he whispered urgently. "We have little time! You take the den and the bedroom, while I examine the kitchen and bath." He took one look at my opening lips and added coldly, "We are looking for anything that might indicate the presence of the old lady here."

I nodded and began to close my mouth when I remembered something else. "But I have no lantern, Homes."

"Use vestas, then, if need be, but hurry!"

He disappeared even as I was fumbling beneath my cape, and

an eerie chill swept over me until I had the first one lit and spied a taper on the mantelpiece. A moment later I was shielding the flickering flame and studying the room in which I stood. To me it appeared as any other room, and my heart sank as I realized how ill-equipped I was for a search of this nature, and that I might very well fail my friend. To bolster my spirits I went to the liquor cabinet, and at that moment the beam of Homes's lantern joined my weaker candle as he returned to the den.

"There is nothing," he said in a dispirited voice, and then his tone sharpened. "Watney! What are you doing?"

"Nothing—" I began guiltily, but before I could offer my excuses he had dropped down beside me and was reaching past my arm for the contents of the cabinet. A moment later and he was pounding my back in congratulation.

"Watney, you have done it! Good man!"

I stared in bewilderment as he began withdrawing bottles and examining them, muttering half to himself as he did so. "Cordon Bleu, Remy Martin, Napoleon, Courvoisier—excellent! With any luck this should do it!"

"But, Homes!" I interjected.

"I do not understand. Do what?"

He swung to me with a fierce light of triumph in his eyes. "My dear Watney! When Duping expressed fear that the old lady would be apprehended in an inebriated state, he was not worrying about *her*, since he gave no indication of reducing the penalty for her crime. No, he was fearful that the cognacs would be consumed, for they are his main interest. By returning these to him, it is well possible that he will allow the matter to drop, and stop his pursuit of the poor woman."

His eyes swung about the room. "Quickly! Find me something in which to package these bottles while I pen a brief note to Duping to enclose. The packet to Le Havre leaves on the midnight tide, and by hurrying we can just make it."

While he bent over the escritoire, I hastily searched the room for wrapping materials, but despite my efforts the best I could find was an old roll of canvas that had been shoved behind a bookcase. I brought it forward hesitatingly and showed it to Homes.

"Ah, well," he said, shrugging, "it is certainly not the cleanest, for somebody has smeared it with tar or something. However, we have no

time for further delays—it will have to do. Help me roll these bottles in it and we will be on our way to the dock. With any luck these will be in Duping's hands to-morrow, and our problem will have been solved."

Our exertions of the previous evening kept us both late abed, and it was close to the hour of noon before I came into our breakfast-room to find Homes already at the table. He nodded to me pleasantly and was about to speak when our page entered and handed Homes a telegraph form.

I seated myself, unfolded the afternoon journal, and was just reaching for the curried kidney when a sharp exclamation of dismay caused me to glance up. Homes, his face ashen, was staring in horror at the slip of paper in his hand.

"Homes!" I cried. "What is it?"

"I am an idiot!" he muttered bitterly. "An abysmal idiot! I should have anticipated this!"

"Anticipated what, Homes?"

I enquired, and for an answer received the telegraph form flung across the table. I read it hastily; its message was succinct.

HOMES, YOU HAVE DONE IT AGAIN. WHISTLER'S MOTHER IS ONCE AGAIN IN OUR HANDS AND HUNG, THANKS TO YOU.

"But, Homes!" I exclaimed. "I do not understand!"

"No?" he replied scathingly. "It is easily enough understood. I failed to take into account that the old lady might follow her booty back across the channel and thus fall into their hands! I am a fool! Rather than save her, I actually led her to her death."

"You must not blame yourself, Homes," I said with warm sympathy. "You did your best, and no man can do more."

"I did far too well," he replied balefully. "Without my help Duping might have searched for the old woman and her cognac for years." He tried to shake off his black mood, shrugging. "Ah, well! It is too late now to cry over spilt milk. Tell me, Watney, is there anything of a criminal nature in to-day's journal to help take my mind from this terrible fiasco?"

I hastily abandoned my kidney, perusing the newspaper instead, running my eyes rapidly down one column after another, but without too much

success. There was, however, one weak possibility, and in lieu of a more interesting case I offered it.

"There is this, Homes," I said, studying the article further. "It seems that a very valuable painting was stolen from the French National Gallery; but the dateline is several days old. It may very well be that by this time the trail is much too cold."

The renewed sparkle in Homes's eyes told me that he was already well on the road to recovery.

"The time element makes no difference, Watney! A crime is a crime, and the more difficult the case, the better I like it! Besides, we have one bit of information the Sûreté lacks: we know that Professor Marty could not have been involved, for we would have come upon some evidence of it during our search. And eliminating this adversary takes us quite a step forward! A telegram to the authorities offering my services. Watney, if you will!"



# → Harry Kemelman

## Man on a Ladder

*One of the most memorable "first stories" to appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine was Harry Kemelman's "The Nine Mile Walk," in the April 1947 issue (good Lord, 27 years ago!). When Dr. Jacques Barzun selected this story for his anthology, THE DELIGHTS OF DETECTION (1961), he wrote: "Nothing less than the play of the detective intelligence upon the physical world will give us a detective tale. It might seem at first sight as if Mr. Kemelman's admirable 'Nine Mile Walk' destroyed the rule: what is his story but a few words overheard and analyzed? This is mere appearance. The detection is genuinely of the physical conditions surrounding the deed."*

Dr. Barzun's comment applies equally to Mr. Kemelman's novelet, "Man on a Ladder." A few words overheard and analyzed? Yes—but again much more than that. Like the other Nicky Welt "adventures in deduction," this novelet is a tour de force; and for a delightful "extra," we suggest that you watch for Mr. Kemelman's brilliant variation of a famous piece of Sherlockism.

## Detective: NICKY WELT

In the parlance of the undergraduate, Gentleman Johnny—more respectfully Professor John Baxter Bowman, Chairman of the History Department—was a swinger, with a taste and an interest in clothes not usually associated with the professoriat. Although he lived at Mrs. Hanrahan's, a rooming house largely occupied by impecunious graduate students, his dress for that staid New England community was flamboyant to the point of eccentricity. He wore a fitted overcoat with an astrakhan collar, lemon-yellow gloves, and was the only man in the university,

perhaps in town, who wore a derby. For one who had been so long at the university, surprisingly little was known about his personal life other than that he had been divorced years ago and that he had a son he never talked about.

There was nothing eccentric about Johnny Bowman's scholarship, however. His reputation was solidly based on three learned books published by the university press and on countless papers which had appeared in academic journals. Then quite suddenly he acquired fame far beyond the limits of our town or of the parochial world of scholars. His latest book, *Growth of the Cities*, won the Gardner Prize for Historical Literature which carried a cash award of \$500.

But what mattered far more was that, because of the prize, the critics took another look at the book, or rather looked at it for the first time since none of the leading reviewers had bothered with it when it first appeared. They discovered that it was "a work of solid scholarship," "a major contribution to the field," and that Professor John Baxter Bowman was "in the tradition of the great philosopher-historians." Overnight the book began to sell, within a month another printing was necessary, and it even appeared

one week on the best-seller lists. It goes without saying that at faculty parties, sooner or later the conversation got around to Johnny Bowman's fabulous luck and to envious speculation on the size of his royalties.

I myself barely knew the man. He was rarely at the Faculty Club, and faculty wives had given up inviting him to parties long before I came to the university. And then I left the Law Faculty to run for District Attorney, so I saw even less of him.

Since the President of the university had suggested I take an extended leave of absence instead of resigning, I was still officially a member of the faculty and as such I was invited to the President's annual Christmas reception. I accepted not only because of past favors from Prex, but because I assumed that Professor Bowman would be there and I had a not unnatural desire to renew my acquaintance with a celebrity.

Traditionally, the President's Christmas reception for the faculty is held on the first day of the holiday vacation. Years ago, when travel was less convenient and more expensive, most of the faculty spent the vacation in town. But nowadays the faculty and the student body alike flee from the campus the moment the last class is over, so

only a small group turns up at the reception. Nevertheless it is still held on the first day of vacation, rather than a day or two earlier when more faculty members might be able to attend. Tradition dies hard in New England.

I walked over to the reception with my good friend Professor Nicholas Welt. He was planning to catch the night train to Chicago where he would spend the vacation, but as the incumbent of the Snowden Professorship of English Literature, the oldest and perhaps the most prestigious chair in the college, he felt he should put in an appearance at the reception.

We were greeted by Prex and his wife, had dutifully nibbled the spreads and sampled the punch. Finding the last wanting, we began working our way to the door when we were hailed by Jan Ladlo. He entered with his new bride of a few weeks in tow. He introduced me; Nicky already knew her—she was a graduate student and had taken courses with him.

“And how does it feel to be Mrs. Ladlo instead of Mrs. Brewster?” he asked.

“Just fine,” she said and put her hand under her husband’s elbow.

Jan Ladlo is a short pudgy man with a round balding head,

a bulbous nose, and protruding myopic eyes. Nevertheless, as an associate professor in the History Department who was still on the right side of forty, he had been considered one of our most eligible bachelors by the faculty wives who are always on the lookout for husbands for their spinster sorority sisters.

“Have you been here long, Professor?” Ladlo asked Nicky. “Has Johnny Bowman shown up yet?”

“Apparently not,” said Nicky. “I guess you will have to represent the History Department.”

I realized that only the older men presumed to call Nicky by his first name, the rest invariably addressed him by title. Not that Nicky is himself old. He is only two or three years older than I, in fact; but he has prematurely white hair—my own is just beginning to gray at the temples—and his gnomelike face is lined.

But that’s not it either—Bowman who is several years older than Nicky is called Johnny by the youngest instructors. I suppose it’s Nicky’s general manner, the way he listens to you when you talk as he might to some luckless freshman asking for an extension on a term paper, that makes you feel young and callow with him.

"Oh, he'll probably be along later," said Ladlo. "And Bob Dykes said he was coming, so I guess the History Department will make a pretty good showing before the evening is over."

"I haven't seen Johnny Bowman in months," said Nicky. "How is he these days?"

"I suppose you mean since he's become a celebrity? No different—same old Johnny."

"I heard he was planning to give up teaching," I said, "now that he can live on his royalties."

Ladlo laughed. "He'll never give up teaching. As a matter of fact, his royalties on *Growth of the Cities* won't come to very much—certainly not enough to retire on. It's the next book he expects will make him some money, big money. You see he's known now and the reviewers will be watching for it."

"And how soon will it come out?"

Ladlo shrugged. "You know how secretive Bowman is. Bob Dykes has been helping him on it. He thinks it's still a long way off. Oh, there's Bob now." He waved and called him over. "Where's Laura? Isn't she coming?"

"Oh, she's off to Florida to visit her folks," Dykes said.

"She went alone?" asked Mrs. Ladlo, unable to understand how a wife could leave

her husband for even a few days.

"I'm going to try to join her," said Dykes with a grin. "There was some work I was doing for Bowman, and I felt I ought to stay until I finished it."

Dykes is an assistant professor in the History Department, and although not yet thirty, is regarded as a "comer." He is a handsome young man, tall and slim, with an aquiline profile and deep-set eyes. His mop of black hair is curiously bisected by a single lock of white which somehow adds a romantic touch.

Everyone likes Dykes. There is something of the small boy about him that disarms criticism. He is a gadgeteer and a hobbyist with a great enthusiasm for anything he happens to be engaged in at the moment—whether it's his ham radio or his photography or his rock hunting. When he talks of them, their potentials seem to expand until you find yourself believing that his interest in ham radio is not just a love of gadgetry but a desire to expand his horizon through enlarged communication; or that his rock collection satisfies not merely his itch for ownership, but gives him a greater understanding of Mother Earth.

And yet his interests had a



curious, boyish practicality—he had sold some of his rock specimens to museums and even to our own Geology Department, and as for his camera, he claimed it had helped pay his way through graduate school.

"We were talking about Bowman's new book," I said. "Is it almost finished?"

Dykes smiled. "It could take another year. You know how these things are. I'm planning to spend part of the vacation working on it."

"Not on your house?" asked Ladlo with a twinkle. Everyone twitted Dykes about his latest hobby—his new house. It was an old Victorian ark of a place that he had bought last year, and he never tired of regaling us at the Faculty Club with the wonders of the place—"built to last; not like the shoddy crack-boxes they're putting up nowadays."

It was spacious and there was room to move around in. And, of course, he had answers to all our objections. It would cost a fortune to heat? He would seal off the rooms not in use. Repairs? He could do most of them himself and enjoyed it. He might even consider cutting up the house into small apartments, as his neighbor who had bought its twin across the street was planning to do.

"Well, there are a couple of

small jobs around the house I may get around to doing, as relaxation from Bowman's work," he admitted. "Anyone seen him tonight?"

"Just coming in now," said Ladlo, nodding toward the door.

Bowman had a young man with him, a blond good-looking youngster in his twenties, and he steered him in our direction. "I'd like you all to meet my son, Charles," he said somewhat diffidently. "Charles is with a publishing house, an editor. He'll be staying for a week or so and he's offered to take a look at the manuscript." He turned to Dykes. "Isn't that splendid, Bobby?"

Dykes nodded slowly and then grinned. "We can sure use all the help we can get."

We talked for a few minutes, and then Nicky glanced at his watch. "If I'm going to catch my train, I'd better get started. It's a longish walk to the station."

"Taking the eight o'clock?" asked Dykes. "I've got my car here. I'll drive you over."

"Very kind of you," said Nicky gruffly.

As we started for the door, Bowman asked, "You coming back, Bobby?"

"I don't think so. I left Duke in the car. I ought to take him home."



"Will you be home tomorrow?"

"I guess so."

"Good, then we'll drop in on you."

We got our coats and went out into the street. "Lot's been happening in your department," I remarked. "Bowman getting out a best-seller, Ladlo getting married—"

"And she's a nice girl, too," Dykes interjected quickly.

"Appears to be."

"Some of the wives of my colleagues haven't been over kind."

"Oh?"

"You know how it is here. They were seen together while she was still a married woman. She was getting a divorce, of course, but they didn't know that. And then when the divorce came through and they got married, there were some who thought she ought not remarry so soon, as though she'd just been widowed."

As we neared the car, a dog began to bark vehemently. Dykes smiled fondly. "That's Duke. He knows my step."

He had acquired the dog shortly after moving into the new house, ostensibly to provide protection and companionship for Laura when she was alone. But it was obvious to anyone who knew Dykes that he had bought Duke because,

like any boy, he wanted a dog. He had spent hours in training him—the usual tricks: to heel, to come on call; and for the last he used one of those silent whistles which he wore on a cord around his neck.

Duke was no ordinary dog. He was a Briard, a Belgian sheepdog, a huge creature with a long rough iron-gray coat, the shaggy fur covering even his face so that you wondered how he could see. I remember when someone observed that it must cost a small fortune to feed the beast, Dykes replied that although the dog did indeed eat a lot, he was thinking of getting a female and breeding her and then selling the puppies. It had struck me as a perfect Dykesian solution to the problem.

Without question the dog was well trained. After expressing its obvious joy at seeing his master, he sat sedately beside Dykes and Nicky and I got in back. As we drove, Dykes kept turning around, much to Nicky's annoyance, to tell us examples of the dog's intelligence, and we were relieved to arrive at the station without mishap.

We saw Nicky off and then Dykes asked if I'd like to stop for a minute and see his place. But I begged off.

"Some other time. I really want to get home now."

"Okay, some other time it is." He seemed hurt by my refusal.

We drove in silence until we reached my door. I thanked him for the lift and remarked that it seemed a shame he had to stay in town during the vacation, what with his wife away and all. "Is the book that far along that these few days will make a difference?"

He shook his head. "We're a long way from finishing, but Johnny was insistent. Maybe he's right because he's got plenty of trouble on this one."

Whatever trouble Johnny Bowman might have had with the book was over. In fact, all his troubles were over. Johnny Bowman was dead.

His death seemingly was the result of idle curiosity. The university was excavating the foundation of a new graduate-school dormitory. At the crest of High Street the excavation came to within a few feet of the roadbed and the police had set up lanterns and a roadblock.

Obviously Bowman must have gone beyond to peer over the edge at the progress of the work. We had had our first snowfall of the winter that morning, and although it was a light snow, less than an inch, the ground was slick. The drop at that point was at least thirty

feet, and either he had slipped, or the ground at the edge had given way. He had fallen to his death.

Since it was Saturday, there was no one working on the site, and for that matter, with vacation, no one was around. A college town becomes a ghost town during the Christmas vacation. The workman who filled and lit the lanterns found him crumpled at the foot of the drop, his derby a few yards away. The body showed the expected contusions, and the medical examiner gave it as his opinion that he had died within minutes of striking the bottom.

Of course the police held an investigation since the death was not due to natural causes. And as D.A., and because of my connection with the university, I felt I ought to take part in it.

I questioned Mrs. Hanrahan, Bowman's landlady, but learned only that he had slept late that Saturday morning and would not have left until sometime around noon. He had stopped at the history office. Professor Ladlo was there, but he had little to offer.

"I must have been the last person to see him alive," he remarked. "Johnny came in around half-past twelve, and we chatted for a few minutes. Then he left saying that he was going to drop in on Bob Dykes, but

I've seen Dykes and he said he was in Norton Saturday afternoon."

"Had he expected to find Dykes here at the history office? Is that why he came?"

Ladlo shook his head. "I don't think so. When they work together, it's mostly at Dykes's house. No, I guess he came here as a matter of habit—he gets his mail here for one thing. Besides, if he were going to Dykes's place, this is on the way."

I questioned Dykes who confirmed that he had not seen Bowman. "I didn't really have an appointment with him," he said. "You heard him. I said I'd be home and he said he might drop around. It was that kind of thing, nothing definite. We've been working here because there's plenty of space and we're not likely to be interrupted; and I have the manuscript and all the notes. Normally, I would have hung around all day—Lord knows I've got plenty to do here. But with Laura gone, I felt kind of restless and I decided to go into Norton to do some shopping."

"I guess I assumed that Johnny would be spending his time with his son. I left here around eleven and when I got to Norton, I just wandered around the stores. I had a bite and then decided, as long as I was there, to really make a day

of it, so I went to a movie—right in the middle of the day," he added wonderingly. "First time I've ever done that sort of thing—go to a movie in the daytime, I mean. And just think, the first time I do something out of the ordinary it results in the death of Johnny Bowman."

"Results? How so?"

"Well, it stands to reason if I had been at home, we would have worked on the book and I would have driven him home."

"How do you know he ever got to your house?"

"Well, of course I don't. I just assumed it. Do you have any evidence that he didn't?"

I shook my head, but because he was obviously distressed and I wanted to relieve his mind, I said, "It's just more likely that it happened on the way to your house rather than on the way back. The slope to the top of High Street from the history office is a good climb, and I myself usually stop a minute to rest before I go on. I'm just guessing, of course, but I think that when Johnny got to the top of the hill, he stopped, and then quite naturally he walked over to see how the excavation was coming along."

I could see that he was grateful for my theory. He nodded his head slowly and thoughtful-

ly. "As a matter of fact, I do the same sort of thing. I don't feel winded when I get to the top"—he grinned at me—"I guess I'm in a little better condition. But I always stop to look at the view. You can see over the whole valley; and I can even see the roof of my house from there."

My visit to the son was more in the nature of a condolence call. But he seemed to take his father's death rather lightly, and I was shocked. I could not refrain from remarking on it.

"What do you expect?" he demanded bitterly. "I knew him about as well as I know you. Since I was thirteen when my parents were divorced, and that's twelve years ago, I've seen my father maybe half a dozen times. I'd get a letter perhaps three or four times a year, and that was all."

"Sometimes," I suggested, "it's not easy for the parent who doesn't have custody to see the children. He may feel that they are resentful and that he is hurting them more by seeing them than by staying away."

"He had visitation rights. He simply never exercised them."

"Then what brought you down at this time? A sudden burst of filial affection?"

"Business—strictly business. My boss found out that my

father had no contract yet for his new book, so he suggested that maybe I could get it for the firm. I thought it might do me some good with them, so I came down."

"Did you tell your father that was why you wanted to see him?"

He had the grace to blush. "No, I just wrote him that I had a week's vacation and would like to see him if he were free."

"And did you get the book for the firm?"

"I didn't broach the subject. I thought I'd play it cool. I just said I'd like to see what he was working on and maybe I could give him some editorial assistance."

I asked if he had seen the manuscript, but he shook his head.

"He said he would see me in the afternoon. We were to have dinner together. I assumed he was planning to bring the manuscript with him. I waited around all day, and when he didn't show I called his rooming house. They said he had left around noon and hadn't returned. I assumed he had forgotten about me. I guess I was annoyed. It was in keeping with the way he had treated me all my life."

"So I left the hotel and walked around town until I got hungry and—oh, yes, I called

the hotel once to see if there was any message, and of course there wasn't. So I ate at a restaurant alone. Then I picked up a magazine and came back here to the hotel and read and watched TV for the rest of the evening."

Our local paper gave the story the full treatment as was fitting with such an important figure in the community. There was a full biography along with quotes from famous people about his book; there was a long statement from the police, a statement from me that included my theory of the time of death, the statements of Mrs. Hanrahan and Professors Ladlo and Dykes together with a picture of each, and finally an editorial gently chiding the police for inadequately safeguarding the dangerous site.

Professor Bowman was buried the day after Christmas. There was a small turnout. Johnny's son was present, of course; he stood bareheaded, his hands clasped behind him, his handsome face impassive. He left immediately after the service.

The next day Nicky Welt returned from Chicago. He had known Bowman for a long time and been friendly with him, so it was only natural that he should want to talk about him.

I told him all the circum-

stances of Bowman's death and the results of our investigation in detail. At the end he pursed his lips and remarked, "It's very curious."

"What's curious?"

"Johnny must have been at least sixty—"

"Sixty-one according to his son."

"Very well, sixty-one. A man who has lived that long has usually learned to avoid the more obvious dangers."

"So?"

"So it's curious that he'd go so close to the edge of an excavation that he'd tumble in."

"It happens all the time. And remember there was some snow and the ground was slippery."

"Yes, I suppose so."

The college flag remained at half mast for a week, and then everyone returned from their vacation, and it was as though Johnny Bowman had never been. It was a phenomenon I had observed before.

Even Dykes who had been closest to him rarely mentioned him. As a matter of fact, he had a brand-new interest. He was on the Executive Committee of the Faculty Club and was in charge of running the annual faculty chess tournament. Since he was one of the best players in the

club with an excellent chance of becoming champion, small wonder that he went about his task with enthusiasm.

Nicky and I had just finished lunching at the club when we came upon him tacking up the results of the draw on the bulletin board. Seeing Nicky, he said, "Hello—we're matched in the first round."

"So we are," said Nicky. "I'm free at the moment if you'd care to play and get it over with."

"I've got all afternoon," said Dykes, "but Laura may phone and I ought to be home to receive her call. She's still in Florida, you know." His face brightened. "Unless you'd care to come over to my place and play there. I've got a board and tournament chessmen. And I'd like you to see my house," he added.

Nicky gave me a questioning glance and I shrugged. "Very well, I could use a good walk."

As we left the club, Dykes turned to Nicky and said, "We go up High Street. It's a bit of a climb."

"My office is in Lever Hall, young man," said Nicky with some asperity, "and I make it by way of High Street every day."

"Oh, sure." Dykes was apologetic. "I just thought—after lunch and all."

The wind whistled down the street and we had to lean forward against it. Dykes strode along on his long legs and Nicky and I strove to keep up with him. A couple of times I thought Nicky would have liked to stop to catch his breath—I know I would have—but it was a point of pride with him never to show weakness, so we continued without stop until we reached the crest of the hill. There Dykes paused.

"My place is over there. You can just see the roof from here."

"Why, it's not far at all," I said.

"About a hundred yards as the crow flies," he said, "but unfortunately it's a lot farther by foot."

Nicky nodded and then walked over to the other side of the road. "And this is where poor Bowman fell, eh?"

Since the accident, the police had put up a sturdy barrier of chain-link fencing which made it impossible to reach to the edge.

"If they had a fence like that up, Bowman would have been alive today," remarked Dykes.

From there on it was downhill and the going was much easier. The street on which Dykes lived was a short private one with just his house and another facing it that might

have been its twin. They were both Victorian houses with numerous turrets and gables and tiny porches that served no really useful purpose.

Dykes stood back in obvious admiration. "What do you think of it? Of course it needs a lot of work, and I'll be busy with putty and paint for most of the summer, I guess, but I feel I've got something here to work on."

He led us up the steps to the front door. He unlocked it and proudly called our attention to its width. "Look at that—almost three inches thick. And that lock and door handle—and this knocker. Solid brass all of it and heavy. I'll bet you couldn't replace this knocker alone for fifty dollars."

The door opened on a small vestibule beyond which was a square reception hall, unfurnished except for a coatrack. Dykes snapped on a light and we could see a large room on either side, and like the reception hall, sparsely furnished.

From below came the sound of a dog barking and a moment later we heard him scratching on a door in the rear of the house, demanding to be let out.

Dykes smiled. "Good old Duke."

"Aren't you going to let him out?" I asked.

"He's better off down

there," he said. Then in a tone of sharp command, "Down, Duke, down. Quiet." The barking and scratching stopped immediately and we heard the dog trot down the stairs. Dykes listened to Duke's retreating footsteps and grinned smugly at the dog's training and obedience.

He led us to a broad staircase and as we started upstairs said, "Take a look at that balustrade, will you? Solid mahogany." He rapped a baluster with his knuckles.

He then led us into a room on the second floor that evidently served as the living room. There were several armchairs, a coffee table, and a rug—probably the furnishings of the Dykeses' former apartment, but now quite lost in this new spaciousness. Over near the window, in an alcove, was a small table with a chessboard and a box of chessmen. Two bridge chairs were drawn up to it; Dykes left the room and quickly returned with a third.

Dykes drew white and won the first game in little more than twenty moves. As they turned the board around for the second game—the rules called for the best two out of three—Dykes said, "I guess that gambit was a little strange to you."

It was certainly strange to me. He had opened by advanc-



ing the king's rook pawn to the fourth space (P-KR4). It was probably the worst opening move on the board and one which I could not recall having seen used except by the rankest beginner. It was as though he were deliberately handicapping himself to make up for having the advantage of drawing white, or perhaps he was showing a kind of courtesy to his older opponent who was also a guest in his house.

Then it occurred to me that by throwing away his first move, he may have wanted to show how lightly he held Nicky. But as the game had progressed, the initial move somehow became the focus for a strong attack on Nicky's king after he had castled. And then quite suddenly, the attack turned out to be a mere diversion and Dykes captured the queen. Nicky had no choice but to resign.

He grunted in acknowledgment of defeat and put down his king. Nicky is not a good loser. They had not played more than half a dozen moves of the second game when we heard a bell ring somewhere toward the back of the house.

"Is that the call you were expecting?" I asked.

"No, that's the doorbell." Dykes left the room and we could hear him shout down the

stairwell, "Come on up."

He escorted into the room a young man of his own age with reddish-brown hair and a white, freckled face with sharp, knowing features. The visitor was dressed in a leather windbreaker with a fur collar. A small foreign camera with a large protruding lens dangled from his neck by a leather strap. Dykes introduced him as his friend, Bud Lesser.

Dykes did not offer to get him a chair and Lesser did not seem to expect one. He stood there, one hand resting on the back of Dykes's chair, his eyes flicking from the board to the faces of the players.

"Do you play, Mr. Lesser?" I asked out of politeness.

"Some."

"He beats me more often than I beat him," said Dykes. He made his move, then leaned back lazily and said, "How do you like my camera, Bud?"

His friend shrugged and smiled. "I don't know. Haven't had time to do a full roll yet. I'll know better when I develop what I've got in here."

Nicky, who was in the throes of deciding on his next move, glared at the two, and Dykes immediately turned his attention back to the board. I, too, concentrated on the board. It seemed to me that Nicky had a slight advantage. He made his



move and we all relaxed a little.

"I've got a Schlossmann antenna you can use for your ham radio—if you're interested," Lesser volunteered.

"Oh, yeah? When did you get it?"

"It's the one I got for myself, but I decided not to use it. My place is too low. I bought two and installed one for Arnold Sterling across the way. He tells me it works fine."

Dykes glanced at the board and negligently pushed a pawn. "I didn't know he had one. When did you put it up?"

"You can see it from here," said Lesser, nodding toward the window. Dykes left the chess table and went to the window to look out. "He wanted it for Christmas, so the day before, I came down at noon and by two o'clock I had it up."

Dykes returned to his seat. "If I had seen you, I would have given you a hand."

"I saw you," said Lesser.

"You couldn't have—I was away all day." He nodded as Nicky made his move and then he made his own immediately after. The game had reached a critical point and Nicky's brow was furrowed as he concentrated on the position. Dykes, too, was hunched as he studied the board.

As Nicky reached forward to move his piece there was a flash

of light and the snick of a camera shutter. Nicky looked up indignantly.

Lesser grinned. "Sorry, I just couldn't resist that shot—the afternoon sun slicing in through the slats of those venetian blinds on you, Bob, like you were dressed in prison stripes."

"Bud has a great eye for trick camera shots," Dykes offered by way of apology for his friend. He concentrated on the board for a minute; then, smiling, he made his move and favored me with a wink. The advantage was clearly with him now. He was completely relaxed as he said to Lesser, "What are you asking for the antenna?"

"Five hundred."

Dykes whistled and shook his head. "I couldn't manage that much."

"I'll take three hundred and your camera."

Nicky moved and Dykes turned his attention once more to the board. He had a clear win now and his next move seemed obvious, but he took a long time thinking about it. Finally he made the expected move and turned once again to Lesser.

"Installed?" he asked.

Lesser hesitated.

"I'd want it right above the dormer window in back," said Dykes.

"Fine with me. I'll put it any place you like."

"It's pretty high—up on one of the gables. Will you need any help?"

"No, I can put it up myself—I've got a magnesium ladder and it's no trouble."

"Okay, when we finish here I'll show you just where I want it."

The game did not last much longer. Another half dozen moves and again Nicky put down his king in acknowledgment of defeat. We followed Dykes downstairs, and then because he seemed to expect it and because by now we were somewhat curious, we followed him to the yard in back of the house.

Dykes pointed up at the roof. "There," he said. "Can you put it up right there?"

Lesser looked up. "Sure. I can rest my ladder right here in front of the cellar bulkhead doors."

"See that molding on the corner? Can you attach it to that?"

"Sure, no sweat. I'll use an angle bracket. Tomorrow be all right? Around noon?"

"Fine."

Lesser left us and Dykes finished showing us around. "What do you think of it?" he asked eagerly. "Do you see what I mean when I say it's

a really solid house and built to last?"

Nicky pointed out the cellar bulkhead doors where Lesser proposed to set his ladder. "I noticed you've had to do some modernizing," he remarked wryly. "Those doors don't look very solid."

Dykes grinned. "I guess there are some things you can't have too solid. The original bulkhead doors weighed a ton and they were pretty far gone. I could have patched them, but you know bulkhead doors don't swing on a hinge. You've got to lift them. Laura couldn't manage those heavy doors in taking her wash from the cellar out to the yard, so I installed these aluminum ones. A child can lift these."

On the way back I was tempted to tease Nicky about the quality of his chess. "You were not doing too badly in that second game," I said. "For a while I thought you might even pull out a win."

Absently-mindedly he agreed. "He does play well, doesn't he? All slap-dash and daring and full of surprises." Then he smiled and added, "But I was so absorbed in the conversation between Dykes and his friend that, frankly, I lost interest in the game."

Nicky always offers excuses for losing at chess.

The next day Nicky and I had just finished lunch at the Faculty Club and were heading back to his office when Dykes joined us and said, "Say, if you fellows are going up High Street, I'll come along if you don't mind."

I am not at all sure that Nicky didn't mind—the chess defeat still rankled—but of course he could not very well refuse. As we walked along, Dykes explained that Lesser was going to put up the new antenna and he felt he ought to give him a hand.

When we came to the top of the hill, Dykes pointed. "Why, there he is now."

We followed the direction of his finger and could see in the distance a tiny figure on a ladder, working away at the edge of the roof. We watched for a moment and then started off. Dykes, who had stopped to tie his shoelace, hurried to catch up and we went on together to Nicky's office.

We stood on the sidewalk talking for a few minutes. Then just as Nicky was about to leave us, Dykes exclaimed, "Why, here comes Duke." He squatted down on his haunches and called, "Here, boy."

The dog seemed to increase his speed as he sighted his master and came bounding up, dancing around Dykes until his

master ordered him sharply, "Down, Duke. Sit." The dog obeyed immediately and sat motionless, a mound of iron-gray fur, except for the ridiculous red flannel tongue which vibrated ecstatically. From deep in his throat came urgent whiny sounds.

"It's just as if he's trying to tell me something, isn't it?" Dykes remarked. "All right, boy, come on." He waved farewell to us and walked off down the road, the dog pacing sedately by his side.

"Smart dog," I remarked.

"Well trained," Nicky amended. I thought I detected in his curt reply that his defeat of yesterday still irritated him. "Well, there's no doubt that the master is plenty smart," I said maliciously.

He did not deign to answer, but turned on his heel and mounted the stairs. I chuckled at the thought that I had reached him—it didn't happen often.

Nothing at my office demanded my attention, so I strolled back by way of the campus where I bumped into Professor Zelsky with whom I had been matched for the first round of the tournament. He was also free, so we returned to the Faculty Club and played our match which I won handily in two straight games. It gave

me considerable satisfaction to know that I had at least made the second round while Nicky had been eliminated in the first.

I played another few games with Zelsky, losing when I gave him an advantage, but invariably winning when we played even. He invited me to dinner at his house and it was quite late when I finally got home.

The next morning I turned on the news broadcast while dressing and heard that Lesser had been killed by a fall from a ladder while working at Dykes's house.

I had only met Lesser once—two days before—and had not found him particularly prepossessing; nevertheless it was something of a shock to realize he was now dead. What made it even worse was that apparently I had seen him only minutes before his death.

I arrived at my office and to my surprise found Nicky waiting. He had the morning newspaper with him and it was folded to one of the inside pages. He tossed it on my desk and tapped it with a long forefinger. "Have you seen this?" he asked.

A glance at the headline told me it was the story on Lesser. "I heard it over the radio this morning," I said.

"I thought you might have more information."

I riffled through the papers on my desk. "Nothing here. But we can step around the corner to Police Headquarters and see what they've got." I wondered a little why he was so interested, but knowing how I felt I assumed he felt the same way.

Captain Scalise was busy checking through the contents of a metal file on his desk when we came in. "This is luck," he said. "I was just planning to drop around to see you."

"Oh?"

"A man, name of Lesser—"

"That's why we're here," I said.

"Then you heard about it?"

"On the morning newscast. It didn't say much. Was there some reason you thought his death might interest me?"

"Well, there is and there isn't," said Scalise. "Seems this Lesser had a little shop where he repaired radios and TVs. He also did some film developing and printing. And he traded in cameras and sold supplies to ham operators. The story as I get it was that he was putting up some special kind of antenna for Professor Dykes. I guess you two must know him."

Nicky and I nodded.

"Well, along about half-past one another professor from the college, name of Jan Ladlo, comes calling on Dykes. He rings the bell and there's no

answer. So he goes around the back. According to him, Dykes frequently works around the back of the house and doesn't always hear the bell. At least that's what he says." He looked at us questioningly.

"Go on."

"Well, his story is that just as he rounded the corner of the house he heard a cry, and looking up, he saw the ladder falling. A moment later Lesser hit the ground. He rushed over, but he saw immediately that there was nothing to do. Ladlo ran out into the street and caught hold of Jeb Grogan who is the patrolman on the beat. According to Grogan Lesser was already dead, but of course he called in for an ambulance."

Scalise opened a desk drawer and took out a large manila envelope. He slid the contents onto the top of the desk. "This is what was found on him."

It was about what you would expect—a well-worn wallet containing eight dollars in bills, a pocket handkerchief, seventy-three cents in coin, and a leather key case. The captain poked in the still open drawer and this time drew out a camera with a leather case and strap. "And he was wearing this at the time. Kind of funny—I mean a man wearing a camera while working on a ladder."

"He was testing it—the cam-

era, I mean. I gather he carried one pretty much all the time."

"Testing it to decide whether to buy it or not?"

"That's right."

"Then that checks. This fellow Dykes called up and asked if he could have it—claimed it was his camera and that you knew about it."

"Is that why you wanted to see me?"

"That was one of the reasons."

"What time did this happen—I mean, Lesser falling?" asked Nicky.

Scalise flipped the pages of a notebook. "It was 1:52 when Grogan saw the body. Figure that Lesser fell a couple of minutes earlier, maybe as much as five minutes because this Ladlo didn't find Grogan right away."

I looked at Nicky. "That must have been within minutes after we saw him from High Street."

Nicky nodded grimly.

Scalise picked up the key case. "This kind of roused my curiosity," he said.

I opened it and disclosed three keys, one of them obviously the key to the dead man's car. "What makes these so interesting?"

"Well, I know Lesser's shop," said Scalise. "It's a little two-by-four place and he lives

in the back. I wouldn't give you a hundred dollars for everything in it. Now this key is the key to the shop, but *this* one is to a safe-deposit box down at the bank. I know because I've got one. So I decided to take a look at the contents of that box. I also had the boys in the squad car look over his place. They brought this file in. It has some papers—mostly bills and invoices and business correspondence. Nothing that helps us. There are also a bunch of pictures—”

“Pictures that Lesser snapped?” asked Nicky. “May I?”

“Sure.” Scalise pushed the file over to him.

“Did the bank manager let you open Lesser’s box?” I asked.

“Oh, I went to see Judge Quigley first, of course.”

“These pictures are extremely interesting,” said Nicky.

“Interesting how?” asked Scalise suspiciously, fearful he had overlooked something.

“They’re all the same kind of thing—what the art critics call *coup d’oeil*, the blink-of-an-eye type of picture, a flash of visual impression that is almost deceptive. There are action pictures—for example, of a basketball game in which the players are like figures in a

ballet; a picture of a full moon transfixed on the spire of a steeple like a ball on a Christmas tree; a picture of two people on a park bench that looks like a single body with two heads.”

Scalise laughed. “Well, he took one other picture that isn’t in that collection. It’s like the blink of an eye, all right. In fact, it will make you blink. I found it in a safe-deposit box—that’s all there was in it.”

He reached into his desk drawer and tossed over to me a small square print. It was of Professor Ladlo and his young wife. They were stark naked.

“A Peeping Tom,” I exclaimed.

“Worse than that,” said Scalise. “Turn it over.”

On the back, in pencil, was a list of dates and beside each a sum of money.

“You’ll notice that starting in May and going through December, there is a hundred dollars a month that I’m guessing Ladlo paid to Lesser.”

“Blackmail?”

“I would say so.”

“They’ve only been married a few weeks—”

“Oh, that’s his wife, is it?”

“But the dates and figures would suggest that this happened some time ago, months ago.” I chuckled. “Sonofagun, I

didn't think Ladlo had it in him."

Nicky cocked a quizzical eyebrow at me. "The initiative could have come from the lady, you know. She has a forceful personality."

"Nicky!"

"Obviously he was on a ladder when he took the shot," he continued, ignoring my outburst.

"How do you know?" asked Scalise.

"Because that took place in Ladlo's apartment. I've been there and I recognize the unusual lamp on the table. Now Ladlo is on the third floor of that new apartment house on Dalton Street. Since there are only one- and two-story houses across the street, he wouldn't have to draw the blinds. You can't see into his apartment from any of the houses across the way. But a man on a ladder putting up an antenna on the roof of one of those houses would be on the third-story level and could see straight in."

I guess you're right," said Scalise. "That must have been the way it was done. In any case, you can see that I was justified in calling in Ladlo to make a statement."

"You showed him the snapshot?" I asked.

"No, I thought I ought to speak to you about it first, him

being a professor at the college and all that. But knowing about the print, I thought it gave me the right to ask questions and get a full statement."

"What sort of questions?"

"The sort of questions you'd ask if you were investigating a crime," he answered sharply, "rather than what you'd need to just fill out an accident report. I asked him why he was calling on Dykes in the first place. You see, if he said he just happened to be in the neighborhood, he could have just happened to see Lesser on top of that ladder. A man on a ladder, Professor," he added with a smile, "can not only see a great distance, but he can also be seen."

"Your idea is that Ladlo might have spotted Lesser on the ladder, approached unnoticed, and upset the ladder?" asked Nicky.

"Why not?"

"It was a magnesium ladder and they're pretty easy to upset," Nicky admitted.

"That's right," said Scalise approvingly.

"And what reason *did* Ladlo give for being there?" I asked.

"He said he went to see Dykes about some manuscript that Dykes was working on. You remember this Professor Bowman who took a tumble a couple of weeks ago up at the



excavation on High Street? He was writing a book with this Dykes, or Dykes was helping him. Now Bowman's son"—he glanced at his notes—"that would be Charles Bowman, he's in the publishing business, and he's interested in getting that book for his own company. And as the old man's heir, I guess he's got a right to it—at least to that part of it that his father wrote. But according to Ladlo, the son was afraid that if he came right out and asked for it, Dykes might balk—try to palm him off with a couple of chapters, claim that the rest was his, or that it was all that had been done. Then a little later, Dykes could bring the book out as his own. So the son asked Ladlo to see Dykes and maybe evaluate the manuscript."

"But why Ladlo? Did the son know him?"

"He met him at Prex's party, of course," Nicky observed. "It would be the natural thing to do—to approach the senior man in the department."

"I gather, too, the young feller hinted that he might let him finish it, either with Dykes or alone," said Scalise.

"And did young Bowman come to see him? He was still in town?" I asked.

"That's what Ladlo said."

"Did you check?"

"I called the hotel and he

had been there all right, but had already left by the time I called. Anyway, that was Ladlo's reason for going to see Dykes. And by the way, that's why he didn't phone first to make an appointment. I got the impression that Ladlo thought Dykes might not be too willing to show the manuscript. His idea was to drop in on Dykes accidentally—as though he just happened to be in the neighborhood and then lead the talk around to the manuscript."

I glanced at Nicky. "What do you think?"

"I think the manuscript might be valuable enough to murder for," said Nicky quietly. "And I think there might be proof in that camera, Captain. I suggest you have the film in it processed immediately."

"You think Lesser might have had a chance to snap a picture of Ladlo just before he fell, maybe even caught him in the act of tipping the ladder?" He looked at Nicky in frank admiration, then flipped the intercom switch on his desk and called in, "Tom, take this down to Ned at the photo lab and tell him I want the roll in it developed and printed right away."

"But it wasn't Ladlo who wanted the manuscript," I protested, "at least not for himself. It was young Bowman—"

"We've got only Ladlo's



word for that," said Scalise. "Besides, Ladlo had reason for killing Lesser because he was blackmailing him."

"He *had* been," Nicky corrected. "That was over and done with—the figures and dates show that. There's a line under the December payment and the amount is totaled: Back in May or earlier, when the picture was taken, it could have done a lot of damage. The lady was suing for divorce at the time. But now that they're married, Ladlo had nothing to fear from him."

Scalise was nettled. "Yeah, but Ladlo paid eight hundred dollars in this little game of Lesser's, and as far as I'm concerned, that's good enough reason for Ladlo to give him the old heave-ho when he saw his chance."

Nicky looked at him in surprise. "Do you really think so, Captain? Eight hundred dollars is a tidy sum, but to a man in Ladlo's position, hardly ruinous. Jan Ladlo is a mild, gentle, scholarly type, not the type I would call vengeful. It's hard for me to imagine him killing someone in cold blood because he had been blackmailed out of eight hundred dollars. And would he have gone looking for a policeman? When he could have walked quietly away?"

Nicky shook his head. "I

doubt if he ever even knew who his blackmailer was. I doubt if Lesser would have approached him directly. My guess is that the arrangements were made by telephone and the money was sent to a box number at the post office. When Lesser saw the announcement of the marriage a few weeks ago, he knew the game was up. It wouldn't surprise me if he sent him the negative as a wedding gift. That would explain why it wasn't in the safe-deposit box with the print."

Suddenly Nicky began to laugh. "Yes, I'm sure of it. It's in keeping with Lesser's rather peculiar sense of humor."

"What do you know about Lesser and his sense of humor?" I asked scornfully. "You saw him for less than a minute yesterday, a hundred yards away. And the day before, you saw him for about ten minutes, and he spoke maybe a hundred words."

"The conversation wasn't long," Nicky admitted, "nevertheless it was quite remarkable."

"What was remarkable about it?"

"Do you remember how it went?"

I flatter myself that as a result of years of courtroom experience in the examination of witnesses I have developed a

pretty good memory for that sort of thing. "Not word for word," I said, "but I remember the gist of it. Dykes asked Lesser how he liked the camera and Lesser answered that he didn't know yet because he was still testing it. Then Lesser asked Dykes if he wanted to buy some special antenna that he had. Dykes asked him when he got it and Lesser said it was one that he had bought for himself but had decided not to use because his place was too low; that he had put one up on the house across the street and that it worked fine. All right so far?"

"You're doing fine."

"Okay. Then Dykes asked him when he had put it up and Lesser said he had installed it in time for Christmas. And Dykes said he would have helped him if he had seen him working. And Lesser answered that he had seen Dykes. So Dykes said he couldn't have because he had been away all day."

"And what did Lesser say to that?"

"He didn't say anything."

"That was what was remarkable about the conversation."

"I don't get it."

"Of course you don't." Now Nicky was scornful. "It's your courtroom training. In the courtroom, dialogue is carried on according to a rigid set of

rules: a question is asked and the question is answered—*finis*. If you should repeat the question, the attorney on the other side or the judge would object that you had already asked your question and received an answer. Then there would be a discussion and finally the judge would rule that the witness did have to answer or did not. Then the witness would ask to have the question repeated—and on and on.

"But normal conversation doesn't work that way. It has a certain rhythm. When Dykes said that Lesser couldn't have seen him on the day in question because he was out of town, Lesser should have said something like, 'Well, I thought it was you,' or 'I could have sworn it was you,' or even, 'I guess I must have been mistaken.' But Lesser said nothing, and I lost all interest in the chess game because I was waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"But still I don't see—"

"What connection it has with the present case? You've forgotten the day they were talking about. Lesser put up the antenna on the day before Christmas. That was the day Johnny Bowman fell to his death and Dykes claimed not to have seen him because he had been out of town all day."

I stared at him. "Are you

suggesting that Bobby Dykes had something to do with Bowman's death?"

"He said he wasn't home when Bowman called because he was out of town. If he lied about seeing Bowman, it could be only because he had some knowledge of his death. And if he claimed he was in Norton all day, it can mean only that he wanted to furnish himself with an alibi."

"But you don't *know* that he was home. Lesser said he saw him and Dykes denied it. And Lesser did not contradict him. And now Lesser is dead and we can't ask him."

"Ah, but he did contradict him. He dropped the other shoe all right, but I didn't know it at the time. Only when I saw this snapshot of Ladlo and his wife did I understand. He answered Dykes by snapping a picture of him and then explained that he couldn't resist the shot, what with the sun slanting through the venetian blinds like prison stripes. In effect, he was saying that he had *proof* of having seen him—that he had a picture of him. Dykes understood because it was then that he asked how much he wanted for the antenna. And if Dykes had any doubt, it was dispelled when Lesser quoted him a price of five hundred dollars."

"You mean that five hun-

dred was a blackmail payment? How do you know? What do you know about the price of an antenna?"

"I'll admit I don't know much about antennae? antennas?" He cocked his head to one side to listen to the sound of the two words. Then he nodded, "Antennas—I think I prefer the English plural; the Latin can be reserved for insects."

"Nicky!"

"Oh, yes, well I don't know much about antennas, but I do know something about five hundred dollars. I saw the antenna that Lesser installed on the house across the street which was the same as the one he was putting up on Dykes's house, and unless it is made of some precious metal instead of the steel it appears to be made of, I would say that five hundred was at least three or four hundred too much."

"But why would Dykes want to kill Bowman, and how would he go about doing it?"

"As to why, obviously to get control of Bowman's manuscript. It's expected to make a lot of money—"

"You mean he'll publish it as his own work?"

"Oh, hardly. He couldn't, and it would do him little good if he did since Bowman's name on the cover is what will sell it.

But as matters stand now, no one knows how much of it has actually been done. He can easily claim that less than half is finished. He will complete it and thus become a co-author rather than a mere research assistant. His name will be on the cover with Bowman's. He will receive at least half the royalties. And the boost to his academic prestige will be enormous."

"I'll grant you that."

"As to how he did it," Nicky went on, "that presents no difficulties. He and Bowman were on High Street—perhaps on their way to meet young Bowman. At the top of the hill they stopped to rest and Dykes could have called Johnny over to look at the excavation. And when Bowman leaned over the edge—" Nicky shrugged.

"You mean he thought of it just like that, on the spur of the moment?" asked Scalise.

"Oh, he's a quick thinker, is our Professor Dykes. You've only to play chess with him to realize that. One glance at the board and he makes his move. But I'm inclined to believe that he had been thinking of this for some time. I have an idea his wife sensed something—I find it suggestive that she went to visit her folks without him and still has not returned. One thing I'm sure of: Bowman never would

have asked him to remain and work on the book while his wife went on vacation alone. Gentleman Johnny was a gentleman."

Nicky cocked a speculative eye at the ceiling. "I wonder what Dykes would have managed if young Bowman hadn't come—"

"Young Bowman? What did he have to do with it?" asked Scalise quickly.

"His coming forced Dykes's hand, of course. Once they went over the manuscript with Johnny's son, Dykes would have been stopped from claiming a major share in its authorship."

"Well, it's an interesting case you've made out, Professor," said Scalise grudgingly, "but I don't see that it does us much good. You'd never get a jury to convict on that kind of evidence. Dykes has only to deny everything, and with Lesser dead, there's no way of proving it."

"You're forgetting the picture that Lesser took," said Nicky.

As if on cue, there was a knock on the door. "Got the pictures for you, Captain," the clerk said.

The film had rolled up into a tight cylinder from the drying process, and we crowded around Scalise as he weighted

one end down with a heavy ruler and unrolled it slowly, studying each frame as he did so. Not till the end of the strip did Nicky point triumphantly and exclaim, "There it is."

The captain and I stared at the frame and then looked at each other, unbelieving. It was indeed a picture of two men—but so foreshortened that at first sight they looked more like short cylindrical stumps surmounted by round buttons which were their heads.

I began to laugh, quite uncontrollably, and Scalise joined me.

"And what do you find so amusing?" Nicky asked icily.

I pointed to the picture. "He bluffed him. The scoundrel bluffed him. There's nothing there that can be used as evidence. There's no way of proving that those are pictures of Dykes and Bowman. It could be any two people."

"Maybe we can bluff Dykes, too," Scalise suggested hopefully. "We don't have to show him the picture—just tell him we've got it and get him to confess."

"There is no need to bluff Dykes," said Nicky coldly. "The picture is valid evidence. Why do you suppose Lesser took it in the first place? Certainly not because he wanted a snapshot of his friend—he could

have taken that any time. He didn't have to wait until he was clinging to a ladder thirty feet or more above ground.

"No, he looked down and saw two men leaning forward against the wind with only the tops of their heads showing, so that at first glance they looked like a couple of toadstools. And that was the kind of subject he enjoyed shooting—the *coup d'oeil*. It was only when he thought about it afterwards that it occurred to him that the picture would show one figure with a derby hat framed against the astrakhan coat collar—that had to be Bowman; and the other showed a white streak bisecting his black head of hair—and that had to be Dykes. And what is more, the snow on the ground showed that it was taken the day before Christmas—our first snowfall of the winter."

Scalise nodded slowly. He looked at me and said, "It adds up. It all adds up."

I nodded. "And what do we do now?"

Nicky rose. He favored us with his frosty little smile, a pursing of the lips as though he had bit into a sour lemon. "I suggest that the good captain might call Professor Dykes and tell him to come down to Police Headquarters to claim his camera."

It was not until we were back in my office that the thought occurred to me.

"Nicky," I exclaimed, "there's something terribly wrong about our line of reasoning. We started out to inquire into Lesser's death. And then we got sidetracked into thinking about Johnny Bowman. But what about Lesser? Was his death an accident, one of those rare coincidences that occasionally do happen in real life? Or was it murder?"

"And if it *was* murder, Dykes couldn't have done it, because he was with us at the time. And if it *wasn't* Dykes, then it must have been someone else. And if it was *someone else*, then our reasoning on Dykes is all wrong."

"Oh, Lesser was murdered all right, and it was Dykes who did it. I know how it was done, but I can't prove it—not that it makes any difference, since the penalty for two murders is no greater than for one. It was indicated in that same remarkable conversation."

At my look of complete confusion, he adopted the tone he uses to address one of his slower students. "You remember that after the price of the antenna was settled, Dykes asked if the fee inclined installation. And when Lesser agreed—"

"Dykes said he wanted it above the dormer in back."

Nicky chuckled. "It was like a chess game between those two—a chess game between two masters. You know, chess players of our caliber," he went on, "we're only too happy when we don't make any mistakes and don't fall into the more obvious traps. Theoretically, since everything is visible on the board, one ought to be able to counter every attack, however devious.

"But players like us, we can't help concentrating on what appears to be the main line of attack. We see the whole board, to be sure, but we concentrate only on the portion that appears to be threatened. But players of the caliber of Dykes and Lesser, they approach the game in a different spirit. The correct response to the position on the board is automatic with them. They play their opponent, concentrating on his psychological weaknesses.

"Oh, they were a precious pair of rascals. Lesser opened with a brilliant gambit. He not only made his blackmail proposition, but made it publicly under the very nose of the District Attorney."

"I suppose that's what you meant by his peculiar sense of humor."

"Precisely. Naturally he was elated—at his success, at his bravado, at his *panache*. When Dykes asked if the price of the antenna included installation, he interpreted it as an attempt by Dykes to salvage something, however small, out of a bad bargain—like a chess player who tries to take a pawn or two when he finds he's going to lose a major piece. Well, Lesser could afford to be generous, so he agreed. But Dykes had something else in mind.

"Oh, it was a magnificent counter! You remember how, when I played with him, his attack on my king turned out to be a diversion so that he could capture my queen—like a stage magician who focuses your attention on one hand while he does something else with the other. He worked the same trick on Lesser. To locate the antenna above that particular dormer called for setting the foot of the ladder right in front of the cellar bulkhead doors. And when we got out into the yard he focused Lesser's attention on the roof and the top of the ladder, but it was the foot of the ladder and its position right in front of the bulkhead doors that really concerned him. And to position the ladder correctly above, it necessarily had to be in the correct

position below—in front of the bulkhead doors. And those doors, you will recall, are so light that a child could lift them."

"You mean if anyone were to raise the bulkhead doors it would upset the ladder?"

Nicky nodded.

"But dammit," I protested, "that would mean someone had to be in the cellar. And it couldn't have been Dykes because he was with us at the time."

"Naturally. He saw to that. We were his alibi."

I snapped my fingers. "His wife! She's been hiding in the cellar all along and—" My voice trailed off at his scornful look. "Yes, I guess that's kind of silly," I mumbled. "Dykes didn't know he was going to have to kill Lesser until a couple of days ago."

"Precisely. But there *was* a resident in the cellar, bigger and stronger than any child. A big brute of a dog. Dykes arranged to be with us as we walked up High Street. At the top of the hill we stopped, and Dykes saw that Lesser was on the ladder. We walked on, you and I, but Dykes stopped to tie his shoelace, and—"

"And what?"

"And blew his silent dog whistle."



# Jacob Hay

## The Man from H-to-M

*Here is Jacob Hay's harshest (and perhaps funniest) and most symbolic (and perhaps most revealing) spy story, recounting the undercover career of Josef Voskovic and the sad undoing of his secret plans and secret training. Josef, ambitious, determined, resourceful, and fighting against unnatural odds, certainly couldn't be faulted for trying . . .*

### Spy: JOSEF VOSKOVIC

It was Mrs. Furstmeyer's decision to have his rented room painted from top to bottom that began the chain of circumstances which led, in the fullness of time, to the abrupt end of the career of Josef Voskovic, aged 31, clerk of the Second Class in the Ministry of State Security (Records and Files Directorate) of the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Czechoslovakia.

In the five years since he had joined the Directorate, Josef had made a most favorable impression on his superiors, rising from his lowly First Class status and a desk among scores of others like it in a huge room to the next grade, and his own cubicle in a room equally huge. It had been clearly intimated to him that his stay in the cubicle

would not be for long; a man as careful in detail as Josef Voskovic could soon look for his own private office, perhaps even a secretary, eventually even a seat among the mighty of the Directorate itself. In sum, his future beckoned brightly and you would think that he would have looked forward to it eagerly.

Instead, he viewed it with mounting dread every passing year. He would grow old and die among these endless rows of towering filing cabinets, his ears filled to the last second by the dull roar of hundreds of drawers rolling outward and then slamming shut. The last fragrance to assail his nostrils would be that of manila folders. He could not help it that he was so attentive to his work; it was



almost instinctive by now.

"In your case, Josef," his mother had told him when he was sixteen, "you will have to work harder—much harder—than other people. You will have to prove yourself to your employers that you can do as well as anybody else. Otherwise, my son, you are sure to starve."

So Josef, whose childhood memories were scarred by the war and the fear of starvation, had worked very hard indeed to get through the gymnasium, and had been graduated near the head of his class. The Civil Service examination to enter the Ministry's employment had been simple for him, although an important exception to the rules had to be made to permit Josef to take the examination. The exception was made in view of his high scholastic record; but Josef was not informed that it had been made—to spare him possible embarrassment.

Josef made the highest marks in a decade, was accepted immediately, and assigned to that most sensitive of departments, the Directorate of Records and Files. Here were housed some of the most fascinating adventure sagas in all the world—police reports, espionage reports, counter-espionage reports, and the dossiers of the Ministry's own agents and

known foreign agents.

These documents became, in a matter of weeks, Josef Voskovic's opium. Almost nightly he stayed long after working hours, reading until, reluctantly, he would go home when the night security guard came through on his first check.

"You will go far in this service, my boy," the elderly night security guard, who was the closest approach to a friend Josef had in Prague, would often remark. "I remember, years ago, the Director himself, then a clerk like you, used to read late into the evening. You will see, Voskovic—for you, the sky is the limit."

"You are too thin, too pale, Herr Voskovic," Mrs. Furstmeyer would scold him, in her German-accented Czech. "You should walk more, get more fresh air."

But Josef was hooked. God, the adventures these men had. There was Kolwitz, slipping in and out of West Germany whenever he pleased, signing himself as "Cassius." And Bernhardt ("Pluvius"), set up in his little tobacconist's shop just off Piccadilly. And Orlovski, the Miami playboy, keeping an eye on the Cuban exiles and calling himself Hank Brewster as he lounged on the Florida beach. Danger, even death, hovered over them all, lending a terrible

zest to life's every second.

How did a man get such a job? What qualifications did he need? Besides courage—and there was no question, no question at all, that Josef had courage to spare; his whole life was proof of that. He had timidly approached his superior about the matter.

"Quite out of the question, my dear Voskovic, and not for the reason you may think. My point is simply that I would not approve of your request for transfer to begin with because you are—and I mean this sincerely—much too valuable to the State right here in the Directorate. Indeed, only this morning the Director singled out your H-to-M Section as having shown the greatest improvement in operation over any other and, my boy, it wouldn't surprise me to see you advanced to head up the H-to-S Section, a real promotion, believe me."

Hopelessly Josef had returned to H-to-M.

"I'm afraid it will mean a night at a hotel, Herr Voskovic," Mrs. Furstmeyer had apologized, "but I am ashamed to charge such a nice young man rent for such a room. It must be painted."

"Please. I don't mind in the least. In fact, it will give me a fine excuse to see that new hotel—what's its name? The one

where all the American tourists stay. For one night I shall be a rich capitalist throwing his money around."

Josef, who was most frugal in his habits, had plenty of money to throw around, but he did not. He telephoned the new Continental Hotel, near the center of Prague, reserved his room and went straight to find the supper he had also ordered by phone waiting, piping hot, for his arrival. The waiter, a worldly man, did not spare Josef a glance as he deftly served the fish, the roast duckling, the Chablis, and the dessert.

Afterward, Josef elected not to descend to the hotel's night club for the music and dancing. But when he went to his valise he realized that he had forgotten to pack the novel he was reading. Hennecott, the supremely clever British agent whose activities had baffled the MGB for far too long, was about to get a chop behind the ear that would end forever his nefarious crimes in the name of imperialism.

Damn! Josef, who rarely cursed, said to himself, and began an aimless search through the bureau drawers; people sometimes left newspapers and magazines behind when they checked out. He was lucky. In the bottom drawer of the bureau he found a battered copy of

an English girlie magazine. It was better than nothing, thought Josef, who read and spoke English reasonably well as one of the requirements of his job.

The fiction was awful; there was no other word for it, but he read it doggedly through. People paid good money for this trash? Incredible. He turned to the back of the magazine.

The advertisements were startlingly frank, even saucy; lacy and revealing girls' underthings, nude photographs, family planning, forbidden books, and—wait a minute!

Josef read the ad, tucked in between one for a massage parlor and another for leather clothing:

#### LEARN DETECTION FOR PROFIT

Intelligent, imaginative men and women sought for comprehensive course in criminology and allied sciences (6 wks) leading to interesting, rewarding careers. Write today for more information, rates, etc.

#### LONDON SCHOOL OF SCIENTIFIC CRIMINOLOGY

Josef had to squint to read the tiny print of the address, which was in London's Bayswater Road.

Who could object? He

would, after all, only be trying to improve himself. And England—well, relations with England were reasonably favorable; mail from there should arouse no unpleasant suspicions, as mail from America might. Suppose, at his own expense, he were to take the six weeks' comprehensive course (there was no doubt that he would pass the examinations, and brilliantly), and then present his diploma to his Chief. Surely, with such a gesture of sacrifice and willingness before him, the Chief would relent and allow Josef Voskovic to apply for service in the Espionage Branch.

The London School of Scientific Criminology's reply to Josef's letter arrived at Mrs. Furstmeyer's mailbox two weeks later in a plain envelope.

"Please note," wrote the Hon. Admissions Dir., Eustace Finch, "the unmarked envelope in which my reply to your letter of inquiry has arrived. It is the first essential of the serious aspirant to a professional career in scientific criminology that he remain anonymous, for anonymity is the price of success in this growing field. In theory, not even your closest friend should know that you are preparing yourself for the practise of your chosen profession."

Josef read the letter in the

privacy of his newly painted room and rejoiced. And the first lessons, which arrived soon after his dispatch of the tuition fee (Ten Pounds Sterling, first two weeks), were fantastically easy—kid stuff, if you came right down to it. *The Bertillon System of Identifying Criminals, The Science of Fingerprints*—principles that any reasonably intelligent ape could master. The real meat of the course began to appear in Lesson Number Six: *Surveillance & Techniques*.

"The art of covert surveillance is perhaps the ultimate accomplishment of the professional criminologist," wrote Prof. Hilary Mulchingham in the accompanying text. "To gain experience in this all-important area of criminological expertise, the beginning student should select an individual, any individual, and place him under 24-hour surveillance for a one-day period. This done, the period may be extended at the student's convenience. Detailed reports should be made, showing movements and times.

"For purposes of easy selection and swift achievement of surveillance skills, American tourists are especially recommended, as they are usually readily recognizable, both from lingual variations and from costume. Lesson six will require a

minimum of ten surveillance reports. It should be borne in mind that the London School of Scientific Criminology depends upon its students for perfect honesty. False reports mean only that the student is cheating himself."

"Paler, thinner, ach! I should write your mother, if I knew her address," Mrs. Furstmeyer had scolded, just after Lesson Number Five, *Dental Identification and Some Aspects of Elemental Forgery*.

"I shall be walking more, Frau Furstmeyer," Josef assured her, smiling. "I shall be following quite a new regimen, believe me," he added. When she had pattered back down the stairs from his third-floor room, he took stock of himself and what he liked to think of as his "working clothes."

The face that looked back at him from the mirror was youthful, almost handsome, with a full head of blond hair, serious blue eyes, and an engaging set of dimples, when he smiled. "His Grandmother's eyes, so bright, so intelligent," was how his mother had described him. So honest and undeceiving, Josef added to himself. And so bitter.

"So, Elizabeth," he whispered to his mirror, "you who giggled when I proposed, you who married that idiot lout,

Kreuta, the butcher, you will see, and when I am strolling about London and New York you will be raising your litter of brats in the sophisticated surroundings of Knov. You, who could have come with me to glorious Prague to be the wife of a national hero, will be wrapping veal and washing diapers in a house that should have been torn down two hundred years ago. The giggles will not come so easily now, I think."

Turning to his newly purchased wardrobe, Josef couldn't help smiling. How had the clerk in the furtive little shop termed the styling? "Like way out, man, just like in New York or—what is it, B.A.? No. Your pardon. Like in L.A. Real cool, you know what I mean?"

The outfit, Josef had decided upon trying it on for size, looked far more suitable for an SS Brigade-fuhrer than for a citizen of Prague; but he had seen enough of them, on those few occasions when he had left his room at Mrs. Furstmeyer's for a glass of Pilsner at the pub on the corner, to know that the grim, black leather, high-booted style was back in vogue among the capital's youth, in spite of the government's disapproval and condemnation.

"The value of the surveillance report," wrote Prof. Mulchingham, "lies in the minute-

ness of its detail. Actions which may appear to have no significance whatsoever to the agent conducting the surveillance may be of infinite value to those charged with analysis of the report. No action, however trivial, should escape the observation of the agent."

How true, Josef mused to himself. This man Mulchingham knew his stuff. Some of Kolwitz's surveillance reports had run to dozens of pages, and Orlovski's two-months-long shadowing of Carlos Maguari in Miami had resulted in a novel-length masterpiece which included, among other things, the price of a Chateaubriand at the Fontainebleau and the name of Senor Maquari's then favorite call girl.

"Begin simply," Lesson Number Six commanded. "Your selection should initially depend on some peculiarity of dress or physique, making the subject easier to pick out in a crowd. Your own dress must be inconspicuous, blending easily into the background, or completely appropriate to the milieu."

At breakfast several mornings later, Josef advised Mrs. Furstmeyer that additional duties at the Directorate would require him to work even longer than usual, possibly as late as midnight on some occasions.

"But they are already working you long past the regular hours," Mrs. Furstmeyer protested. "It is not right, Herr Voskovic. I am of a mind to complain to the authorities."

"No, please!" Josef replied, more sharply than he had intended. "It is, after all, in the interests of my career," he added, more gently. "The sacrifice will be worth it, I assure you."

It would not, of course, do for Mrs. Furstmeyer to see him returning, ostensibly, to his work after supper attired in his black leather motorcycle jacket, black denim trousers tucked into black leather boots, and the high-peaked cap that topped off the ensemble. These he would carry in his valise, with the explanation that it contained his night clothes in the event that he decided to sleep at the office. The change of clothing could be simply effected in a public lavatory.

The surveillance of American tourists turned out to be absurdly easy. To begin with, they were ridiculously easy to spot, better dressed, strung about with cameras and light meters, and wearing those stupid expressions of people expecting to be arrested at almost any second by the security police.

It was the detailed reports that were the bore but, as Josef well knew, these would consti-

tute the solid foundation on which he would rest his case.

Subjects Number 1 and 2, Mr. and Mrs. Luther T. Hoopes, of Des Moines, Iowa, U.S.A., were almost too easy. Indeed, in their efforts to find the famed Restaurant Granisol, buried away in a tiny alley, Mr. Hoopes had actually turned and come up to Josef, dawdling half a block behind, and, first determining that Josef could speak English, had asked for directions.

"Say, fella," Mr. Hoopes had said, his directions received, "that's real decent of you. How's about you let Mrs. Hoopes and me buy you a drink at the bar on the corner, there. Least we can do."

"I am very sorry, sir, but—"

"C'mon, fella, even if it's only a glass of spritz. We owe it to you." Mr. Hoopes smiled benignly. "You're like Lootie, Junior, I'll bet; can't stand the taste of the stuff, even at his age. Sophomore at You of Eye, too."

"What the war did to his generation," Mrs. Hoopes whispered to her husband after Josef, his lemonade downed, left them. "When I think of Lootie—" She sighed, her eyes moist. "Do you think he'll really make varsity tackle next year, Luther?"

John J. Sperling, Middle

European Sales Representative of the American Dynamometer Corp., was a tougher proposition who used a hired car and driver; but the difficulties involved in keeping track of Mr. Sperling's movements were overcome by Josef's acquisition of a motor scooter several owners old on the installment purchase plan. Sperling's occasions were, for the most part, unexciting—visits to the Ministry of Construction & Engineering, calls at the homes of Ministry officials. The value of this surveillance, Josef concluded, lay in the experience gained in dodging his motor scooter behind parked cars when Mr. Sperling's automobile slowed or stopped. It took damned quick thinking.

But it was the work afoot that was most challenging. To follow an American down a dark street, to keep a casual eye on him in one of the city's few night spots, even to follow him into the lavatory for a completely unnecessary combing of the hair and grooming of the nails—all this was challenging and exciting.

"Lesson Number Six. Student's results: Excellent," declared the London School of Scientific Criminology exuberantly, and Prof. Mulchingham himself appended a personal note of congratulations.

"I look forward with the greatest interest to your handling of Lesson Number Seven: *Basic Extortion & Blackmail Countermeasures*," he wrote.

As with Lesson Six, Josef took fullest advantage of the availability of practical experience, and was thus enabled to make a slight increase in his monthly income through the knowledge that the Chief of the A-to-H Section, unknown of course to that worthy man's wife, was keeping a Eurasian graduate student at the University of Prague as his mistress. An honorable man, Josef ceased his demands for money the day the London School of Scientific Criminology advised him that he had passed his written examination for Lesson Seven with flying colors.

But this was mere icing on the cake. Anybody could learn all about blackmail and extortion in a few hours of study. What he needed most was more experience in Lesson Six, and this could easily be fitted in with the requirements of Lesson Eight: *Codes & Ciphers, with Notes on Basic Cryptanalysis*. Indeed, he could gain still greater advantage from both lessons were he to put his surveillance reports in code. What an impression that would make!

Within a few weeks Josef's



closet was awash with closely written, enormously detailed reports of the surveillances he had undertaken to perfect his art. All were in a code which the London School of Scientific Criminology had declared to be completely unbreakable to any but the most skilled cryptanalyst.

Lesson Number Nine, *Self-Defense, Judo, and Karate*, posed problems. If, Josef reasoned, he presented himself at some physical training academy to learn these primarily Oriental arts, it would be a dead giveaway. Why was a member of the Directorate staff taking judo and karate, instead of automatic data processing and computer operations? Unless he intended to put it to use professionally, and where else would that be but in espionage or counterespionage? Nonetheless, judo and karate were absolutely indispensable to his future career—indeed, they might make all the difference when he went to present his case.

Although he had long since completed the ten surveillances required by Lesson Six, Josef continued to track American tourists as they left the Continental Hotel to view the sights of Prague, with the result that he frequently found himself in odd corners of the ancient city where few people were in evi-

dence. This lent added zest to the experience, for it required greater care and skill though, after dark, Josef had the feeling that he himself was being followed, and concluded that if this was the case, his shadower was probably intent not on him but on the tourist, whom he intended to yoke and rob once he, Josef, was out of the way. Such criminals, giving Prague and, indeed, all Czechoslovakia a bad name, deserved to be punished.

So it was that upon concluding an evening-long surveillance of Mr. Nathan Levy, of Cleveland, Ohio, whose great-grandparents had emigrated from Prague to the United States and who wished to see their old home in a seedy quarter of the city, Josef slipped into a dark doorway, and as his shadower passed, he nipped smartly out of the blackness and, leaping, executed the sharp throat chop so earnestly recommended by the London School of Scientific Criminology to beginners in karate. His victim went down like a sack.

Lesson Nine saw six of Josef's shadowers out like lights. Sometimes, sitting in the office that went with his Section chieftaincy, Josef's mild face would twist into a grin as he wondered what Miss Jelinka, his secretary, would think if she

knew that he was capable, with one swift movement, of heaving her across the room. He wondered what his father would think, he who had been so ashamed of Josef's poor showing in sports at school.

"You are looking so much better these days, Herr Voskovic," Mrs. Furstmeyer kept telling him, beaming maternally as she spoke. "But I am sorry to see that you have taken to smoking cigarettes."

Josef's new habit was motivated by the addiction of Koroshko, the handsome, brilliant MGB agent, hero of a series of espionage novels, who had finally brought Hennecott, the villainous British agent, to justice. In times of crisis Koroshko was wont to calmly light a cigarette.

Finally, the splendid day arrived when the morning post brought a large envelope containing Josef's diploma from the London School of Scientific Criminology, certifying that he had successfully completed its courses. The diploma was accompanied by a personal letter from Mr. Claude Fincastle, Manager Dir. of the L.S.S.C., himself, congratulating Josef on having attained the highest marks in the school's long and honorable history, and wishing him well in his new career as a scientific criminologist.

Josef smiled his small twist-

ed smile. Little did Managing Dir. Fincastle know that the subtle skills he and his faculty had imparted to Josef Voskovic might some day be employed against their own country. Bernhardt, with his tobacconist's shop off Piccadilly, couldn't last forever. Josef, with his increasingly fine grasp of English, would be the logical man to take over.

He had spent long hours composing his letter to Bromstein. There was no point in going through his immediate superior who would, of course, refuse to consider the matter. No, the thing to do was to write directly to the mysterious Siegfried Bromstein, Major General of the Czechoslovakian Army and Chief of the Intelligence Directorate, the second most powerful man in State Security and, some said, secretly more powerful than the Minister himself, and taking his orders directly from the Kremlin.

He was unprepared for the prompt response, which came the day after he mailed his letter. He had just finished dictating a somewhat severe reprimand to his successor as head of the H-to-M Section, pointing out that the dossier on Mueller, the Gehlen Organization's man in Prague, was in disarray and appeared to have been handled by a clerk who had just finished

eating chocolate. Although he was soon to leave this tedious business, Josef had not permitted himself to become slack in matters of discipline. A junior clerk entered Voskovic's office, looking slightly flustered.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, a trifle unsteadily, "but two gentlemen from the Intelligence Directorate are asking if you could spare them a moment of your time."

"By all means show them in, Renner," Josef said, dumfounded.

It was the taller of the two visitors who did the talking: General Bromstein would be pleased to receive Mr. Voskovic in his offices at once.

"Splendid, splendid," Josef replied, smiling hugely. "I can turn the Section over to Bulik for the morning."

"General Bromstein will be most pleased," said the taller man smoothly. "We have our car waiting."

The Intelligence Directorate occupied its own quarters across the city, and the exulting Josef felt that Prague had never looked so lovely as it did during this supremely enjoyable ride.

General Bromstein, a stocky, dark-haired man whose eyebrows met in the middle forming a kind of second mustache to match the one beneath his hawk's nose, received Josef in

full uniform and with great geniality.

"Sit down, sit down by all means, my dear sir," he bade a flattered Josef, waving toward one of the vast leather armchairs before his imposing desk. Josef sank self-consciously into the depths of the chair, waiting for Bromstein's amused stare, but there was none.

"But this is magnificent," Bromstein declared happily, extracting a cigar from his humidor and extending it to Josef, who shook his head numbly. He wished desperately that he had remembered to bring his pack of cigarettes with him, but the cigar would have made him ill. The General lit the cigar for himself and exhaled a mighty cloud of blue smoke toward the ceiling before returning his sharp gaze to Voskovic.

"By God, Voskovic, I never will understand the C.I.A.'s methods, if they are in fact methods and not madness."

"The imperialists are indeed devious," Josef allowed himself to agree, further flattered that the great General Bromstein would open the conversation with professional shop talk. "Of that there is no doubt."

"Oh, come off it, Voskovic," the General exclaimed impatiently. "You and I are both old hands at this game, even if we are on different sides of the

fence. Now why in God's name have you saved me the trouble of coming after you? What the hell's your proposition? Why does the C.I.A.'s top man in Prague ask to see me if he doesn't have some sort of proposition?"

"Different sides—proposition—C.I.A.?" Josef's voice was that of an aging choir boy reaching for a high note.

"My dear chap, we began keeping a quiet eye on you within weeks after you came to work for the Directorate and started staying long after hours, reading our files. Such behavior in a very junior clerk is a bit unusual—in fact, almost beyond belief. But since we knew where to lay our hands on you, we did nothing. So for five years, you were simply an agent in place. Then, some six or seven weeks ago, you finally opened your communications channel to the States via that laughably transparent front organization in London."

"But my dear General—" Josef started to protest and fell silent as the General held up a hand.

"Please allow me the professional pleasure of explaining our own methods. I must confess that we have been unable to break the code you employ in your reports to London. Those coded reports in your

room—mere smokescreen, of course, intended to put us off the track—were child's play, by the way, and I can't imagine why you went to all that trouble. Or did you intend to turn them over to us as evidence of your patriotism? And we would be expected to believe that here was a lowly clerk doing his citizen's duty by following foreigners around the city, was that it, Voskovic?

"I concede, on the other hand, that your insertion of yourself in place of the real Josef Voskovic, who, we have reason to suspect, disappeared during the train journey from his home in Krnov to Prague, was masterly, quite masterly. After which, posing as the real Voskovic, you had complete access to our files, our most secret files, and when you had learned enough, you opened communications, right?"

Josef could only stare in total bewilderment, feeling panic rising, his mouth dry, his ears buzzing.

"Why did we allow you to continue?" the General asked rhetorically, his voice thoughtful. "For a number of reasons. We knew you could never memorize all the material in our files—no one man could possibly achieve that. The solution was absurdly simple. From the time you opened communica-

tions all the dossiers you ordered to be sent to your office—I assume you photographed them—were deliberately falsified, a matter easily arranged. So our inability to break your code is of comparatively small consequence. Amusing, no?”

The General blew a smoke ring, and smiled appreciatively at its perfect shape. “We even gave you a promotion so that you would not suspect us of suspecting you.”

Josef’s reply was an incoherent sputter. The General chuckled.

“Then, too,” he continued pleasantly, “our procedure allowed us to ascertain your contacts among the American agents posing as tourists. I must say I rather enjoyed that hideous black costume of yours, very much the Prague teen-ager. Quite original.”

General Bromstein’s expression became rueful.

“But was it really necessary to knock my men out? They were, after all, doing you no harm, my dear fellow. Branke, poor chap, was hospitalized for a week with a badly sprained neck.” The General’s voice became brisk. “This won’t do, will it? Now, let’s get down to business, Voskovic or whatever your name is. What’s your proposition? Come now, out with it, man!”

Josef began to babble. The General regarded him with sympathetic interest, then pressed a button set into the panel at one side of his desk. Josef’s escorts entered.

“Take him away,” the General commanded quietly. “I’ve seen it happen before—the poor devil’s gone clean out of his head. Understandable, of course, especially in his case. Nevertheless, he can still be quite useful to me. Have them give him a sedative and keep him sedated until I need him. And, of course, completely isolated.”

Josef’s babblings had given way to high, hysterical laughter as he was led gently from the office, offering no resistance.

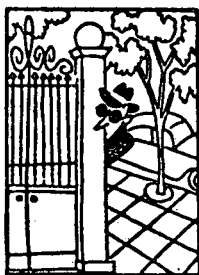
Ah, well, the General thought to himself, that’s one of the chances you take in this dirty business. It was possible, of course, that Voskovic, his mind unhinged, had intended to defect and seek asylum from his organization’s vengeance. If the C.I.A. did in actual fact have a proposition to discuss, Bromstein reflected, he would learn about it in the fullness of time from the unfortunate Voskovic’s successor. In the meantime, Josef Voskovic could serve an important purpose.

So it came to pass that, a few weeks later on a dark and blustery night in the middle of

a Berlin bridge lit only by the glaring headlights of two cars facing one another from opposite ends of the structure, two huddled groups of figures shuffled slowly toward each other, halting a few feet apart. No salutes were exchanged as Hank Brewster came home from Miami and Josef Voskovic, described by General Bromstein during the negotiations only as "an important member of your organization," and still hazy with sedatives and incoherent of speech, began his long journey to the at-first-bewildered and then indignant reception in a vast

building rambling massively over the Virginia countryside just across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

As Josef and his new friends moved toward the western end of the bridge, General Bromstein looked after them, shaking his head. "No," he muttered to his aide-de-camp, "I will never understand the C.I.A. mentality. The incredible gall of these people. Consider, my dear Kolsky: they plan to infiltrate our most secret files, and to do it, they send out an agent just four feet tall. Fantastic, simply fantastic, wouldn't you say?"



# Ellery Queen

## A Question of Honor

*If the man from Scotland Yard bungled it again, the resulting scandal would shake the foundations of the Empire. . . Ellery Queen and his father had good reason to worry. . .*

### Detective: ELLERY QUEEN

It wasn't every day that Ellery found himself meeting a policeman who was a minor authority on Shakespeare, and he shook the hand of Inspector Queen's British visitor with interest. It was a hard hand attached to a squared-off torso, satisfying the professional requirements; but above the neck Inspector Burke of New Scotland Yard took an unexpected turn—broad forehead, pale skin, and the bright, sad eyes of a scholar.

"Over here on a case, Inspector Burke?"

"Yes, and then again no," said the Scotland Yard man dourly. "All hoods make not monks," as Katherine points out in *Henry VIII*. I'm here hunting a bad one, right enough; but the thing is, he's waiting for me—and, what's more, when I catch the blighter I'm going to have to let him go."

"Why?" asked Ellery, astonished.

"Seems like a long trip, Burke," grinned Inspector Queen, "for mere exercise."

"Necessity's sharp pinch, gentlemen." The Englishman's sad eyes turned sharp. "It's rather a yarn. A certain young woman in London—daughter of someone very highly placed—is shortly to announce her betrothal to a man very much in the international eye. The principals are so distinguished that—well, the match couldn't have been made without the consent of Whitehall, which is all I'm free to say about it at this time.

"A year or so ago this girl, who is charming but headstrong and overromantic," continued the British policeman, "wrote seven highly indiscreet letters to a man with whom she was then infatuated.



"Now the position of the girl's fiance is such that, should those letters get to him or become public knowledge, he would be forced to break the engagement, and the resulting scandal would almost certainly create a nasty diplomatic situation in an extremely sensitive political area. 'Great floods from simple sources,' you know!

"When the girl's...family learned about the letters, they took immediate steps to retrieve them. But there was the rub. The man to whom they'd been written no longer had them. They had just been stolen from him."

"Hm," said Ellery's father.

"No, no, Queen, he's above suspicion. Besides, we know the identity of the thief. Or rather," said Inspector Burke gloomily, "we're positive he's one of three men."

"Parties of our acquaintance?" asked Ellery.

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Queen, if you've browsed through your Rogues' Gallery recently. They're all Americans. One is the international jewel thief and society impersonator, William Ackley, Jr., alias Lord Rogers, alias le Comte de Crécy; another is the confidence man, J. Phillip Benson, alias John Hammerschmidt, alias Phil the Penman; the third is Walter

Chase, the transatlantic card-sharp."

The Queens exchanged glances; Ackley, Benson, and Chase were three of Centre Street's incurable headaches.

"When the matter was turned over to the Yard, very hush-hush, I was placed in charge, and I bungled it." Inspector Burke's sensitive face flushed. "Word leaked out that something big was in the wind, and all sorts of mugs with guilty consciences ran for cover before we could tighten our lines. Among them were Benson, Chase, and Ackley—all three got away to the States. One of them—exactly which one we haven't been able to determine—subsequently made contact, with demands and instructions, and I'm here to pay off."

Inspector Queen clucked. "When and where, Burke?"

"Tonight, in my hotel room. I'm to hand him twenty thousand pounds in American dollars—in exchange, of course, for the letters. So tonight I'll know which of the three he is—and much good will it do me." The Englishman rose, tightening his lips. "And that's my tale of woe, Queen. I must ask you not to go near any of the trio—really my chief reason for stopping by. We can't risk another slip. Those letters must be repossessed and returned to

England to be destroyed."

"Can we give you any help?"

"No, no. Unless I botch it again—in which case," said Inspector Burke with a twisted smile, "you might offer me a job sweeping out your office. I shan't feel very happy about going back . . . Well! Gentlemen, wish me luck."

"Luck," said the Queens soberly.

They recalled the bitter twist in Burke's smile the next time they saw him, which was in his hotel room the following morning. A chambermaid had found him. He had been seated slackly in the armchair beside the neatly made bed, a bullet hole in his powder-burned right temple. He had been dead since the night before. No shot had been heard; it was an ultra-modern hotel, with soundproof walls. The gun lying on the carpet below his right hand had already been checked in the police laboratory against the slug dug out of his head.

The room was the picture of peace. A Gladstone bag was spread on the luggage rack, undisturbed. The night table held Burke's pipe and tobacco pouch and a dog-eared copy of Shakespeare's plays with Burke's signature on the flyleaf. A dispatch case initialed *L. B.* lay open and empty on the bed.

"Poor Burke," muttered Inspector Queen. He handed Ellery a sheet of hotel stationery. "Found on the writing table. It has a couple of his fingerprints on it, and it's his handwriting—we've checked."

The script was even and unhurried, as if the brain directing the hand that had written it had reached a decision:

*"Mine honor is my life; both  
grow in one;  
Take honor from me, and my  
life is done."*

—Lester Burke

"Epitaph by Shakespeare," murmured Ellery. "What went wrong, Dad?"

"Apparently his man came last night with the letters, as agreed, but while Burke checked them over—probably turning away slightly—the rat sapped him; Doc says there's a slight contusion toward the back of Burke's head. Then the double-crosser took the money and the letters, and skipped. Guess he figures those highborn pash notes are good for at least one more transatlantic squeeze when the heat dies down, and meanwhile he's got some fifty-odd grand to tide him over. And when poor old Burke came to and realized what he'd

let happen—and all it meant—he couldn't face the disgrace and committed suicide."

"There's no doubt it is suicide?"

"You name it. Bullet fired in contact with Burke's temple, angle of entry checks for a right-handed man, slug from Burke's own gun found with the body, Burke's prints on the stock. Suicide note in Burke's authenticated handwriting. Letters not here. Money taken. It's suicide, all right—the only question is which one of those three cuties crossed Burke up and drove him to it. . . Ackley, Chase, or Benson."

Benson, a gray-haired, dapper little man with a Florida tan, was located in a barber shop on Park Row having his nails manicured. The confidence man looked like a Wall Street broker or a corporation executive. He seemed annoyed.

"Don't know what you're talking about, Inspector," Benson snapped. "I can account for every second of my time all day yesterday until well after midnight. I was up in Westchester looking over some property with two associates of mine, we had dinner and spent the evening discussing the deal at the home of one of them in White Plains, and the other one drove me back to my apartment

in town—dropped me off a few minutes past one A.M. Their names? Certainly!"

Benson's associates turned out to be two confidence men with slightly lesser reputations. However, they corroborated Benson's story, which was all Inspector Queen was interested in at the moment.

Chase was located in a midtown hotel at the tail end of an all-night poker game—a big, soft-spoken rancher type of man, whose drawl and slow movements ingeniously drew attention from the smooth lightning of his long white hands. No pigeon was being plucked; Chase's companions were professional gamblers.

"Relaxation," smiled the cardsharp. "Man gets tired playin' with rank amateurs. Last night, Inspector? Why, I've been right here since we started our game four o'clock yesterday afternoon. Haven't left this room. Have I, boys?"

Four heads shook emphatically.

That seemed to make it Ackley, whom they found at breakfast in a triplex Park Avenue apartment with its owner, a bejeweled society widow who was outraged at the interruption. Ackley was a tall, lean, handsome man with dark curly hair and piercing black eyes.

"Ackley?" echoed the lady furiously. "This gentleman is Lord Rogers, the big-game hunter, and his lordship has been entertaining me since the cocktail hour yesterday afternoon with his fascinating adventures in Kenya and Tanganyika—"

"Continuously, madam?" asked Inspector Queen politely.

"I—ah—put him up for the night," said the lady, coloring. "We—he retired at two A.M. Will you please get out!"

"After you, your lordship," said the Inspector; and the jewel thief shrugged and went along.

Ellery followed in troubled silence.

He was not to break that silence for a long time. For the three alibis remained unshaken, and Ackley, Chase, and Benson had to be released for lack of evidence.

"One of those alibis is rigged!" yelled the Inspector. "But which one?"

The letters and the money failed to turn up.

Inspector Queen raged and fumed, but the case had to be written off. Ellery fumed, too, but for other reasons. Something about the circumstances of Burke's death was wrong, he felt in his bones, but what it was he simply could not diagnose. And Inspector

Burke's body and effects were shipped back to England, and the cables from London suddenly stopped, and that seemed the end of it.

But it was not, and it broke out again in the oddest way. One night, weeks later, Inspector Queen came home bemoaning the deterioration of the new generation of police officers. They had all reverted to childhood, the Inspector snorted at dinner, spending their spare time at headquarters playing games.

"Games?" said Ellery.

"Crime puzzles. They make 'em up and challenge one another to solve 'em. They've even got the Chief Inspector doing it! Though come to think of it," the Inspector chuckled, "one he tossed at me today is pretty darn clever. Typical detective-story situation: Rich man with three no-good heirs who need money bad. He's bumped off, one of the three did it, and each claims an alibi for the time of the murder. One says he was in the Museum of Art looking at some eighteenth-century American paintings. The second says he was dialing his bookie's private phone number, Aqueduct 4-2320, putting down a horse bet. The third says he was in a Flatbush bar talking to a French sailor

named Socrates Papadapolis who was on his way to Indo-China. Question: Which alibi was the sure-enough phony? Get it, son?"

"Sure," grinned Ellery; but then the grin faded, and his fork banged against his plate. "The Burke case," he choked.

His father stared. "The Burke case? What about it?"

"I knew we were played for suckers, Dad, but till you threw me that puzzle just now, I didn't see how!"

"How?" repeated the Inspector, bewildered.

"Burke didn't commit suicide—he was murdered. Take your crime puzzle," said Ellery swiftly. "The Museum of Art alibi and the Flatbush bar alibi might or might not have been false, and only an investigation would tell, but the phone-call-to-the-bookie alibi needs no investigation—it's false on the face of it. No one can dial an exchange like Aqueduct, which starts with the letters AQ, because every phone dial in the United States has one letter of the alphabet missing. It has no letter Q.

"And that told me what we'd missed in the Burke setup.

"Dad," cried Ellery, "that note in Lester Burke's handwriting was a forgery. If it was a forgery, Burke didn't write it. If Burke didn't write it, he didn't

commit suicide—he was murdered. The devil sapped Burke, all right, and placed the unconscious man carefully in the armchair, shot him with his own gun, put Burke's prints on the gun and note, left the forged suicide note on the desk—the kind of note Burke might genuinely have written, a Shakespearean quotation—slipped out with the money and letters, and rejoined his alibi-ing confederates.

"But the fact that the note was a forgery identifies the killer. Ackley is a jewel thief and society impersonator. Chase is a cardsharp. Benson is a confidence man—but he's something else, too. One of his aliases is Phil the Penman—a tag only a professional forger could have earned!"

"Yes, but wait, wait," protested Inspector Queen. "But how do you *know* that the suicide note was a fake?"

"Benson pulled a boner. Do you remember how he spelled the word 'honor'—spelled it twice—in the quotation?"

"Honor?" The Inspector frowned. "H-o-n-o-r. What's wrong with that, Ellery?"

"Burke was an Englishman, Dad. Had he written that quotation, he'd have spelled 'honor' the way all Englishmen spell it . . . h-o-n-o-u-r. *It had no letter U!*"

# Georges Simenon

## The Old Lady of Bayeux-

(translated by Anthony Boucher)

*Inspector Maigret felt in his bones it was his kind of case, the kind he liked best, the kind that presented a dignified facade, decorous characters, every indication of exaggerated virtue. Then it was "up to Maigret to tear down that facade, to sniff around in the ruins and nose out at last the human beast, the most unforgivable of evils, the killer for profit"... Watch Maigret at work—the placid, ironic, harmless-looking, clumsy-seeming Maigret who knew so well, under his bumbling facade, how to play cat and mouse with a murderer...*

### Detective: INSPECTOR MAIGRET

Sit down, Mademoiselle." Maigret sighed as he regretfully set aside his pipe.

And he again looked at the prosecutor's note and read, "A family matter. Please hear what Cecile Ledru has to say; but observe the utmost discretion in acting on it."

This was at Caen, in the period when Maigret had been sent down there to reorganize the district constabulary. He could not get used to this grasping, secretive Norman province; he felt hampered, confined, and missed the freedom of action he had enjoyed in Paris.

This note, for instance: "A family matter... the utmost discretion..." Did this mean he was once more going to run up against the family of some high official or important personage of the district? It was incredible how many provincial big guns had cousins and brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law who had to be handled gently by the police!

"I'm listening, Mademoiselle Ledru."

She was something to look at, this Mademoiselle Cecile, almost too good-looking—an effect heightened by the mourn-

ing which poetically emphasized her naturally pale complexion.

"Your age?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Profession?"

"I suppose it would be best to explain everything to you, so that you can understand my position. I was an orphan, and I started out in life, at the age of fifteen, as a maid of all work. I was still wearing pigtails, and I didn't know how to read or write."

Maigret suppressed his astonishment. This was an amazing beginning for one who now possessed so marked an air of distinction.

"Please go on."

"I happened to secure employment with Madame Croizier, at Bayeux. You've heard of her?"

"I confess I haven't." These provincials! Always assuming that the whole world knows their local characters!

"I'll tell you more about her later. She became very fond of me. She induced me to study and make something of myself. Then she kept me with her, no longer as a servant, but as a companion. She asked me to call her Aunt Josephine."

"So you live in Bayeux with Madame Josephine Croizier?"

The girl's eyes clouded over with tears. "That's all over

now," she said, drying her eyes with a handkerchief. "Aunt Josephine died yesterday, here in Caen. That's why I came to see you. To tell you about the murder and—"

"Just a moment! You're sure that Madame Croizier was murdered?"

"I swear it."

"You were there?"

"No."

"Someone told you?"

"My aunt herself!"

"I beg your pardon? Your aunt *told* you that she had been murdered?"

"Please, Inspector! I am not suffering from delusions; I know very well what I'm saying. My aunt has told me time and again that if anything should happen to her in the house in the Rue des Recollets, my first duty should be to demand an investigation into—"

"Just a moment. What is this 'house in the Rue des Recollets'?"

"The home of her nephew, Philippe Deligeard. Aunt Josephine had come to Caen for several weeks to have her teeth attended to. At 68, she was having trouble with them for the first time. She was staying with her nephew, and I had remained at Bayeux because Philippe doesn't care for me at all."

On a scrap of paper Maigret



jotted down *Philippe Deligeard*.

"How old is this nephew?"

"Forty-four or five."

"Profession?"

"He has none. He had a fortune—his wife's—but I believe that for several years that fortune has been only a memory. Nevertheless, he still keeps up a large house in the Rue des Recollets, with cook, butler, and chauffeur. Philippe often came to Bayeux to beg his aunt to lend him money."

"And did she?"

"Never! She used to tell her nephew he had only to be patient and wait for her death."

As the young woman talked on, Maigret mentally arranged one of his habitual resumes:

First of all, there lived in Bayeux, in one of those quiet streets near the cathedral where the sound of a footstep makes the curtains tremble in every window, a Madame Josephine Croizier, widow of Justin Croizier.

Now the story of her fortune was at once macabre and droll. Croizier, a mere law clerk when he married, was a monomaniac on the subject of insurance. His hobby was to spend his time signing policies with every possible company, to the scornful amusement of all concerned.

For the first and last time in his life, he took the boat to Southampton. It was a rough

crossing. A lurch of the ship hurled him against a bulkhead and cracked his skull open; his widow, shortly thereafter, was astonished to receive a million francs from divers insurance companies.

From that time on Josephine Croizier's only amusements, in her gloomy house in Bayeux, were to look after this constantly growing fortune and to spend whole afternoons chatting with her protegee, Cecile Ledru. She succeeded so well in the first of these occupations that she was rumored to be worth four or five million francs.

Her sister's son, Philippe Deligeard, had started off elegantly by marrying the daughter of a rich dealer in horses. He had furnished a magnificent mansion, renowned as one of the show-places of Caen. But his investments had proved as unfortunate as his aunt's had been lucky; and it was rumored that he had been living for three or four years on credit, borrowing money at high interest against his future inheritance from his aunt.

"In short, Mademoiselle Cecile, the only serious basis for your accusation is that Philippe needed money badly, and his aunt's death provides him with it?"

"I already told you that Madame Croizier herself always

said that if she should die in the Rue des Recollets—”

“Pardon me, but you must know how much the fears of old ladies are worth as evidence. Now, about the actual facts of the case?”

“My aunt died yesterday, around five in the afternoon. They’re trying to claim that she had a heart attack!”

“Did she have heart trouble?”

“Nothing to die of.”

“Were you in Bayeux at this time?”

It seemed to Maigret, though it might have been a misleading impression, that the young lady showed hesitation in answering.

“No . . . I was here in Caen.”

“I thought that you had not accompanied Josephine Croizier on this trip?”

“That’s right. But by bus it’s only a half-hour from Bayeux to Caen. I came in to do a little shopping.”

“And you didn’t try to see your aunt, as you call her?”

“I stopped by the house in the Rue des Recollets.”

“At what time?”

“Around four. They told me that Madame Croizier had gone out.”

“Who told you that?”

“The butler.”

“After asking his employers?”

“No. On his own.”

“Then we must believe either that it was true, or that he’d been given his instructions beforehand.”

“That’s what I thought.”

“Then where did you go?”

“Downtown. I had a lot of little things to do. Then I went back to Bayeux, and this morning, when I read the Caen paper, I learned of my aunt’s death.”

“Curious . . .”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I say it’s curious. At four in the afternoon, when you call in the Rue des Recollets, you’re told that your aunt is out. You go back to Bayeux, and the next morning you learn in the paper that your aunt died only a few minutes, an hour at most, after your visit. Is it correct that you’ve requested a police investigation, Mademoiselle Cecile?”

“Yes, Inspector. I haven’t any fortune; but I’d gladly give the little I have to discover the truth and punish the guilty.”

“Just a moment. Speaking of the state of your finances, may I ask if you stand to inherit from Josephine Croizier?”

“I’m certain that I shan’t. I myself drew up her will, and I positively refused to accept anything whatsoever. Otherwise no one would have believed how truly disinterested my af-

fection has been, during the years which I have devoted to my benefactress."

She was almost too good to be true. Seek as he would, Maigret could not find the chink in her armor. "So you're left without a penny?"

"I didn't say that, Inspector. I received a salary as Madame Croizier's companion. Since I had no expenses, I was able to put away a nice little nest egg which will see me through for a while—though I'm willing to spend every sou of it to avenge my aunt."

"May I ask one more question? Philippe is the heir, isn't he? Now supposing it's proved he killed his aunt—then he won't be allowed to inherit. What will become of the millions?"

"They will go to institutions for the protection of young girls."

"Madame Croizier was interested in that sort of charity?"

"She felt a pity for young girls who live alone; she knew the dangers that surround them..."

"She was very strait-laced?"

Cecile hesitated a moment, thinking it over. "Very much so."

"A trifle fanatical on the subject?"

"Almost..."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle."

"You are going to make an investigation, aren't you?"

"I'll check up on the situation, and if it seems necessary... By the way, where can I find you?"

"My aunt's body is lying in the house in the Rue des Recollets. Until the funeral—that will be two days from now, here in Caen—I'll be there with her most of the time."

"In spite of Philippe?"

"We don't speak to each other, and I don't so much as set foot in the rest of the house. I pray and I cry a little... At night, I'm staying at the Hotel Saint-Georges."

Maigret finished his pipe while his little eyes studied the enormous gray house, the carriage gate with its copper ring, the ornate entrance court with its bronze candelabras.

It was almost twenty-four hours since the girl's visit. It had taken Maigret that long to clear up enough of the details of his reorganization to allow him to take charge of the investigation in person; any other Inspector in Caen, he feared, might take the Prosecutor's request for discretion too seriously. And discretion and all, he felt in his bones that this was going to be his kind of case—even though he had a sinking feeling that it would be what he called

a No-Pipe Case—an investigation conducted in scenes of such respectability that the Inspector could not decently keep his hay-burner in his mouth.

That was why he stole a few last puffs before going in, watching the people who came and went: ladies in black, gentlemen formally garbed—all of the haute bourgeoisie of Caen come to pay their respects.

"This'll be a cheerful party!" he sighed as he finally tapped his pipe against his heel. And he went in like the rest, passed by the silver tray full of visiting cards, reached the end of a blue-and-white tiled hall, and beheld, beyond a large door draped with black, the coffin—surrounded by flowers, by candles, by black silhouettes, standing and kneeling.

The odor of burning wax and chrysanthemums was in itself enough to establish the atmosphere. Then the whisperings, the handkerchiefs dabbing at the mourning nostrils, that great air of dignity which people assume only before justice and death . . .

Cecile Ledru was there in a corner, kneeling on a prie-dieu, her face covered by a black veil transparent enough to reveal her composed features, and the movement of her lips as the beads of a jade rosary slipped through her fingers.

A man clad all in black, his eyes reddened, his features distorted, kept watching Maigret as though wondering what right he had there. The Inspector went up to him. "Monsieur Philippe Deligeard? I'm Inspector Maigret. If you could let me see you alone a moment."

Maigret had the impression that the man cast a nasty look at the girl before leaving the black-draped room. "Come with me, monsieur. My office is on the next floor."

A marble staircase with a beautiful iron railing. On the wall of the landing, a genuine Aubusson tapestry. Then an enormous office, with Empire furnishings, whose three windows opened on a park larger than seemed possible here in the midst of the city.

"Please sit down. I imagine that girl is still continuing her machinations and that I owe the pleasure of this visit to her?"

"You refer to Mademoiselle Cecile Ledru?"

"I do indeed refer to that conspirator from below stairs who contrived, for a brief space of time, to exert an undue and unfortunate influence upon my aunt. A cigar?"

"No, thank you. You say 'for a brief space of time.' Should I take it that this influence didn't last?"

Maigret had no need to study Philippe Deligeard closely. Elegantly dressed even in his mourning, he was the perfect type to be found in every provincial city: the rich bourgeois, keeping up an impressive establishment, insisting above all on decorum, on the precise cut of clothes, the telling details of speech and manner that distinguished him from the common run of mortals.

"You understand, Inspector, how extremely painful, not to say disagreeable, it is to me to receive, in such sorrowful moments, the visit of a policeman. Nevertheless, I shall answer your questions. I want this affair to be cleared up, and I want to see Cecile receive the punishment which she so well deserves."

"Which is . . . ?"

"As your previous question proves, you understand that my aunt was not ultimately deceived by the hypocritical manners of that girl nor by her supposedly disinterested devotion. As evidence I may adduce the fact that when my aunt came to spend a month with us here, we suggested that she might bring her companion with her; the house is large enough. And she flatly refused, telling us in confidence that she had had enough of the girl and was looking for a way to get rid

of her. All that she feared was that, if she broke off the relationship too brutally, Cecile might try to seek some revenge."

Maigret could not help it. It was the general atmosphere that forced him to murmur, with an irony which his host overlooked, "How wicked and deceitful people are!"

"Sooner or later, therefore, my aunt would have made a clean break with this creature, who had even tried to cause trouble between my aunt and me."

"She did?"

"Claiming, among other things, that I had mistresses. Now as man to man, Inspector, you'll admit that at my age and in my situation it's natural to . . . oh, discreetly, of course! like any man of the world . . . But of course my poor aunt, with her fixation on purity, couldn't understand that. You can't talk with old people about this sort of thing."

"Cecile told her?"

"How else could my aunt have learned it? But it was an unwise move; that treacherous girl saw her own maneuver rebound against her. When my aunt learned that her chaste companion was receiving, under her very roof, secret visits from a young man of whom the least that can be said is that his

family is not of the best . . ."

"Cecile had a lover?" If Maigret's indignation was not actual, it was admirably played. And he took advantage of it to slip his pipe from his pocket with the most innocent air, as though he had completely forgotten the sumptuous decor which surrounded him and the Havana cigars awaiting him on the desk.

"For the last two years! It's two years now that they've been meeting almost every night. His name is Jacques Mercier. He and a friend have some sort of transportation business. And it's worth observing that his parents went through bankruptcy several years ago."

"Would you believe it! And you told this to your aunt?"

"Of course. Why shouldn't I? Wasn't it my duty?"

"Naturally."

"That was when my aunt finally made up her mind to get rid of Cecile. But the fear of some attempt at revenge still made her hesitate. That's why I suggested to my aunt that she should henceforth stay with us. I would have placed the entire second floor at her disposal."

"And when were these questions discussed?"

"Why . . . the day before yesterday . . ."

"And a decision was reached?"

"Not formally. But the principle was established."

"Nevertheless, I don't imagine that you'd accuse Cecile of having murdered your aunt?"

Philippe lifted his head abruptly and looked at Maigret with utter astonishment. "But there's no question of murder! That girl must be as insane as she is vicious if she's been telling you such absurd fantasies. My aunt died of a heart attack. The medical examiner expressly stated as much in his certificate."

"In short, you do not accuse Cecile of the murder of your aunt?"

"I certainly would if I were not sure that my aunt had died a natural death. As it is, however, if this girl continues to spread such stories about us, I shall be forced to bring suit against her for slander."

"One question, Monsieur Deligeard: Your aunt died around five o'clock, didn't she?"

"A few minutes after five, yes. Or so my wife tells me; I was not here myself."

"All right. Now, around four o'clock, Josephine Croizier was not in this house."

"Every day at four she had an appointment with her dentist. She was having several bridges fitted—a long and difficult job."

"Do you know what time

your aunt came back to the house?"

"Around five, they tell me. It was almost immediately after her return that she had the attack; she died before anyone could do anything for her."

"The attack happened in her bedroom?"

"Yes. The Louis XIV room on the second floor."

"Your wife was up there with her?"

"She went up as soon as my aunt opened her door and called for help."

"May I ask where you were?"

"I imagine, Inspector, that these questions are not part of a formal investigation? That, I warn you, I will not tolerate."

"Of course not. This is just so we can prove to that nuisance of a girl that there's nothing to investigate."

"Ah . . . Certainly . . . I must have been at my club. I generally leave here around four thirty or quarter of five, and walk through the city to get a little exercise. Around five I settle down to bridge, and at seven thirty the car comes to bring me home for dinner."

"You received the news by telephone at your club?"

"Exactly."

"And when you got home?"

"My aunt was dead and the doctor was already here."

"Your family doctor?"

"No; he lives too far away. My wife called a doctor in the neighborhood; but it was too late for him to do anything."

"The servants?"

"Arsene, the chauffeur, had the day off. The butler is on duty on the main floor all afternoon. The cook must, I imagine, have been in the kitchen. Now is there anything more that you would like to know, Inspector? I owe a duty to those who have come to offer me their condolences, and I am expecting at any moment the presiding judge, who is also president of my club. I think the best thing that you can do is to give that girl a good warning. If she continues to spread these vile stories, I'll have a warrant out against her."

Philippe Deligeard must have wondered what could have caused, in so solemn a moment, the odd smile on Maigret's lips. The Inspector had, for some moments, been staring at the mirror over the fireplace, which reflected a curtained doorway. The curtain had moved several times, and once the Inspector had glimpsed a pale face which could belong only to Madame Deligeard. He could not help speculating whether she had overheard her husband's man-to-man exposition of the life of a man-of-the-world.



"Good day, Inspector. I dare hope that after these explanations which I have taken the trouble to make, my mourning will no longer be disturbed by this stupid and indecent fiction. The butler will show you out."

Philippe rang, nodded curtly to the policeman, and moved off with dignified strides toward the curtained doorway.

A quarter of an hour later Maigret sat in the office of the Prosecutor for the Republic—a placid and ironic Maigret, regretfully fingering his pipe in his pocket; for the Caen Prosecutor was not a man to allow smoking in his office.

"Well, Inspector? You heard the girl's story?"

"I also visited the scene of the death."

"What's your opinion? A lot of nonsense, isn't it?"

"On the contrary, I have the feeling that this poor old lady Josephine Croizier was assisted on her way out of this world. But by whom? That's the question . . . And there's one other question: Do you really want to find out?"

The Hotel Saint-Georges was one of those little residence hotels which exist in every city—the hotels you never hear of unless someone sends you there, the hotels whose tenants are old people, priests, fanat-

ically devout girls—in short everyone remotely connected with pious devotion, from beadles to candle manufacturers.

The lobby was furnished with rattan chairs. Maigret had been waiting there a good half-hour. An old lady looked up from her embroidery from time to time to cast a glance of suspicious severity at the Inspector, as the smoke of his pipe drifted up to form a bluish halo around the chandelier.

You, my fine fellow, are waiting for the same person I am, Maigret had wagered as soon as he saw a young man pacing up and down the lobby and consulting his watch at one-minute intervals.

Now, after a half-hour's wait, the two men had come to know each other without exchanging a word. As the young man surveyed Maigret from head to foot, his thoughts were self-evident: So this is the famous Inspector whom Cecile was talking about! He looks harmless enough . . . plump, good-natured . . . But there must be some news, since he's looked up Cecile at the hotel.

And for his part Maigret was thinking, Not bad, this young Jacques Mercier! Quite a boy, in fact—maybe a little too much so. Not at all the proper young provincial. Looks as if he might

have ideas of his own. Good features, wavy hair, bright eyes, fire in his veins . . . Aha! Mademoiselle Cecile! It looks to me as if you liked contrasts, and as if your prudence might be a bit less pronounced at night.

When she came in, she first saw Jacques Mercier, and a smile lit up her face. But the young man pointed to the Inspector, and she came up to him frowning.

"You want to talk to me?" she asked. She did not seem pleased to meet Maigret in her lover's presence.

"I'd like to straighten out a few small matters. But this doesn't seem to me to be quite the right place. This hotel's so quiet you can hear the moths buzzing. Wouldn't you like to go out to a café for a moment?"

Cecile looked at Mercier. He nodded, and a little later the three of them were sitting in a bar, with a billiard game going on next to them.

"First of all, let me point out, Mademoiselle Cecile, that it wasn't very nice of you not to mention Monseigneur Mercier to me."

"I felt he had nothing to do with the case; but I should have known Philippe would tell you all about him. What else did he say about me?"

"Very nasty things, as you

might guess. I believe he's what they call a perfect man of the world, but he has a very sharp tongue. One beer, waiter! What are you drinking, Mademoiselle? Port? You too? Two ports."

Maigret relaxed on the mole-skin banquette, his eyes mechanically following the billiard balls. As he smoked in little voluptuous puffs, he seemed to be savoring the gray pervasive peace of provincial life.

"So this has been going on for two years?"

"It's two years since we met, if that's what you mean."

"And how long has it been since Monsieur Mercier fell into the habit of spending his nights in the old lady's house?"

"Over a year . . ."

"It never occurred to you to get married?"

"The old lady, as you call her, would never have allowed it. Or rather, she would have regarded it as an act of treason against her. She was jealous of my affection. There was nobody else in her life but nephews whom she loathed; so she looked on me as the one thing belonging to her. It was for her sake that I concealed my relationship with Jacques, so as not to hurt her feelings."

She answered Maigret's questions docilely enough, while her companion occasion-

ally raised his eyebrows, as though to suggest a trifle more discretion.

"Your turn, Monsieur Mercier."

"I don't see how I'm involved in—"

"Nobody's trying to involve you. Mademoiselle Cecile has asked the police to do a job, and you can help by answering questions. Philippe Deligeard asserts that your business isn't doing well. Is that true?"

"Well . . ."

"Is it true?"

"Answer him, Jacques!"

"It's true enough. I went into business with a friend, and we bought three used trucks to transport fish from the little ports on the Channel. Unfortunately, the trucks turned out to be in pretty bad shape, and what with all the repairs and—"

"When's it due?"

"When's what due?"

"Your going out of business?"

"The trucks haven't run for three days now, because the garage rent isn't paid."

"Thank you. Now, Mademoiselle, would you tell me again what time you reached the Rue des Recollets?"

"Day before yesterday? Around four . . . wasn't it, Jacques?"

"I beg your pardon; you were with her?"

"I brought her in my car and waited at the corner. It must have been five after four."

"You drove her from Bayeux?" Maigret looked severely at Cecile, who had told him she came by bus. "All right. Now tell me, Mademoiselle: when you learned of Josephine Croizier's death from the paper, I imagine you asked Mercier to drive you back to Caen. What time did you reach the Rue des Recollets?"

"Around nine thirty in the morning."

"Then the old lady had been dead for a whole night. Will you tell me precisely what you saw?"

"What do you mean? First I saw the butler, then some men in the great hall, then Philippe Deligeard who came up to me and sneered, 'I thought you'd come running!' Then I saw my aunt—"

"One moment. This is the part that interests me. You saw your aunt's body. Where?"

"In the coffin."

"So it was already in the coffin, but the lid hadn't been closed yet?"

"They closed it a little later. I saw them. The men I'd met in the hall were from the funeral parlor."

"So you recognized your aunt's face? You're certain of that?"

"Absolutely! What on earth are you thinking of?"

"You didn't notice anything abnormal?"

"Of course not. I was crying . . . I was very upset . . . I should have liked to be alone with her a little, but that wasn't possible . . ."

"One last question: I know the main entrance to the house in the Rue des Recollets. But I imagine there must be another?"

"There's a little door in the rear, on the Rue de l'Echaudé. That's more of an alley than a street; there aren't any houses facing on it, just garden walls."

"If you go in by this door, can you get into the upper part of the house without going near the butler or the cook?"

"Yes. You take what they call the staircase; it leads to the second floor."

"How much do I owe you, waiter? Thank you, Mademoiselle. And you too, Monsieur Mercier."

Maigret paid the bill and rose, more cheerful than the circumstances seemed to indicate.

A few minutes later, his pipe still in his mouth, he had entered Deligeard's club and made his way into the secretary's office. There he asked a number of questions and jotted down the answers detailedly in his

notebook, with an ever-growing air of satisfaction.

"Now let me read this summary back to you. You say that you're certain you saw Philippe Deligeard arrive day before yesterday at five fifteen . . . that's right? His three usual partners were waiting for him to round out the bridge game that regularly started at five. He took his place at the table. As soon as the cards were dealt he was called to the telephone. When he left the booth, he'd turned very pale, and announced that his aunt had just died at his home . . . That's all; you can't think of anything more to add? Thank you. Good day, monsieur."

And Maigret shrugged his shoulders as he crossed through the solemn rooms where sad old men, sunk into the depths of their armchairs, dozed behind the screens of their newspapers.

Dr. Lievin, the neighborhood doctor who had been called in too late, was a very young man with bright red hair. He wore a white coat and was at the moment engaged in broiling a chop over the gas stove in his consulting room.

"Am I disturbing you, Doctor? You'll forgive me, but I need a few details concerning the death of Madame Croizier."

Lievin was a bare twenty-

seven. He had just begun to practice in Caen; and to judge from his office, he was not yet overburdened with patients.

"I suppose, first of all, that you are the nearest doctor to the Deligeards' house?"

"Almost. I think I have a colleague in the Rue des Minimes."

"Had you had any previous occasion to be called in by M. Deligeard?"

"Never. As you realized when you came in, I've just begun my practice here and I don't have many patients. It was quite a surprise to me to be called in to one of the finest homes in the city."

"What time was it? Can you fix the time exactly?"

"With the most rigorous precision," Lievin smiled. "I have a little nurse who comes in every afternoon for my consultation hours; she leaves at five o'clock. She had just put on her hat and I was in the very act of kissing her when the phone rang."

"So it was five exactly. How long did it take you to reach the Rue des Recollets?"

"Seven or eight minutes."

"The butler let you in and took you up to the second floor?"

"No, not exactly. The butler opened the door, but all at once a woman leaned over the staircase and called down, 'Come

quickly, Doctor!'" It was Madame Deligeard, and she herself showed me into the bedroom on the right—"

"Just a minute. The bedroom on the right... that would be a room with light blue hangings?"

"You're mistaken, Inspector. The room on the right is papered, not hung. Wall paper with yellow circles."

"Louis XIV furniture?"

"Pardon me. I know a little about periods, and I can state positively that the room on the right is Regency."

To the doctor's astonishment, Maigret wrote all these apparently insignificant details down in his notebook. "All right. You're upstairs and it's about five ten. Where's the body?"

"On the bed, of course."

"Undressed?"

"Naturally."

"I beg your pardon. This was at five ten, and Josephine Croizier was undressed. What was she wearing?"

"A nightgown and a robe."

"Outer clothing lying around?"

"I don't think so... No; everything neat and in order."

"And no one there but Madame Deligeard?"

"Yes. She was extremely nervous. She described her aunt's attack; I realized that

death must have been practically instantaneous. Nevertheless, I examined the dead woman and found that she had been in a greatly weakened condition; this must have been at least her tenth attack."

"Could you determine approximately the time of death?"

"That's automatic... Within a minute or two, I'd place the death at four fifteen."

The doctor recoiled in astonishment as Maigret leaped up and seized him by the shoulders. "What? Four fifteen?"

"Why, yes. Madame Deligeard made no secret of the fact that she'd tried to get hold of two other doctors before falling back on me. That takes some time—"

"Four fifteen!" Maigret repeated, rubbing his brow. "I don't want to offend you, Doctor, but... you're new at the game... are you positive of what you're saying? Would you persist in this statement if a man's life were at stake?"

"I could only repeat—"

"All right. I believe you. But I ought to warn you that you'll almost certainly have to repeat this statement in court, and the lawyers'll do everything they can to break your testimony."

"They won't succeed."

"Have you anything else to tell me? What happened next?"

"Nothing. I signed the death certificate. Mme. Deligeard insisted on paying me on the spot and gave me two hundred francs."

"Is that your usual fee?"

"Hardly. It was her idea; I didn't argue. She went with me halfway downstairs. The butler opened the door for me."

"And you didn't meet anyone else?"

"Not a soul."

Through the windows of the little house Maigret could see the family at dinner. "It can't be helped," he muttered, as he interrupted the domestic scene by pressing the doorbell.

The medical examiner was a little old man, half-deaf, still holding his napkin in his hand. He led Maigret into an office reeking of cabbage soup and ringing with the clatter of knives and forks from the dining-room.

"Did you know Monsieur and Madame Deligeard before you were called in to certify their aunt's death officially?"

"I've vaguely noticed Monsieur Deligeard around town. After all, he's a prominent man. But we didn't move in the same circles."

"When did you go to the house?"

"The city hall notified me around six thirty. I reached the

Rue des Recollets before seven."

"You knew Madame Croizier?"

"No. The butler asked me to wait while he announced me to his master. Then Monsieur Deligeard took me up to the second floor and into a room done all in yellow—"

"You're sure it was a yellow room?"

"Absolutely. It struck me because my daughter wants a yellow room and my wife insists it isn't the right thing. I found that the old lady had died of a heart attack and I filled out the usual forms."

"She was undressed?"

"In her night clothes."

"No disorder in the room?"

"I didn't notice any."

"Did you meet anyone?"

"Not a soul. Why?"

"Finally, have you any idea of the time of death?"

"I wasn't paying much attention . . . Between four and five, I'm sure."

"Thank you."

The smell of the soup had roused the Inspector's appetite. He betook himself to a restaurant noted for its Normandy sole and its tripe *a la mode de Caen*. Even the restaurant, like all the other scenes which Maigret had visited that day, had something dusty and solemn about it—a sort of deliberate austerity.

Yet this was the sort of case

that Maigret liked best: a dignified facade, venerable and decorous characters, every indication of virtue exaggerated to the point of boredom. And then it was up to Maigret to tear down that facade, to sniff around in the ruins and nose out at last the human beast, the most unforgivable of evils, the killer for profit.

He was taking it easy on this case. There was a certain malicious pleasure in proceeding slowly, in playing cat and mouse with the murderer . . .

The Prosecutor had repeated, "Do what you must, but be discreet! A slip could cost you dear . . . and me too. Philippe Deligeard is a well-known man about town; he may have his debts, but he's received everywhere. And as for the girl—Cecile, as you call her—if you lay a hand on her, you'll have the press championing her as the victim of the capitalists. The watchword, Inspector, is discretion!"

And Maigret had murmured to himself, disrespectfully, "All right, old lady! But nobody's going to get away with anything."

The tripe was tasty, and Maigret left the table in a state of bliss heightened by his inability to refuse the proprietor's calvados.

"Pretty soon I'll have it all



straightened out," he promised himself. "And now, an interview with that butler..."

The Deligeards' butler answered his ring and began to show him into the waiting-room.

"No, my friend, it's you I want to talk to. You know who I am, don't you? What were you doing when I rang?"

"Coffee was being served in the kitchen."

"Then I'll have my coffee in there with you."

There was nothing for the butler to do in the face of this self-invitation but to lead Maigret to the kitchen and announce to the cook and the chauffeur, "The Inspector would like a cup of coffee..."

Arsene, the chauffeur, wore a very elegant gray uniform, now unbuttoned for kitchen informality. The cook was a very fat woman.

"Don't disturb yourselves on my account, friends. I could have called you down to headquarters; but it wasn't worth bothering you for such trifles. Don't button up, Arsene! Be comfortable... By the way, how did you happen to have the day off the day before yesterday? Was it your regular day?"

"Not exactly. That morning the boss said out of a clear sky

that I couldn't have my day off next week on account of a trip to the South, so I'd better take it then."

"Monsieur Philippe drove himself then?"

"Yes. I didn't think he'd be needing the car, but I noticed he'd used it."

"How could you tell?"

"There were mud spots inside."

"It wasn't raining; so he must have gone to the country?"

"Well, around here, you see, the country starts right near the house. A few hundred yards and you're off the paved roads."

Maigret turned to the butler. "And where were you during the afternoon?"

"In the pantry, which is near the entrance hall. The day before yesterday I was polishing the silver."

"Can you tell me what time Madame Croizier went out?"

"A few minutes before four, the same as every day. Her appointment with the dentist was at four, and he's only a stone's throw away from here."

"She looked well?"

"She always did. She was a very well preserved woman—very cheerful, not at all proud. She never went by without a word for us."

"Did she say anything in

particular to you this time?"

"No. She simply called out, 'See you later, Victor.'"

"She walked to the dentist's office?"

"Madame Croizier did not care for automobiles. Even when she went home to Bayeux, she always preferred to take the train."

"Could you tell me where the car was at that time?"

"No, monsieur."

"It wasn't in the garage?"

"No, monsieur. Monsieur and Madame went out in it immediately after lunch. They came back about an hour later, but they must have left the car outside. I should tell you it's never parked in this street—it's too narrow—but around the corner, where I can't see it when I open the door."

"So Monsieur and Madame, as you say, came back around three. One hour later, a little before four, Madame Josephine Croizier went out. Then?"

"Mademoiselle Cecile called."

"At what time?"

"Four ten. I told her that her aunt had left, and she went away."

"She didn't see anyone except you?"

"No one."

"And then?"

"Monsieur went out. It was four twenty-five. I noticed the

time, because it was a little early for him."

"He wasn't carrying anything?"

"Not a thing."

"He behaved normally?"

"I think so."

"Go on."

"I'd just begun on the knives . . . Yes . . . that was all that happened then. And it was almost five when Madame Croizier came back."

"Still looking fine?"

"And in very good humor. She said to me as she went by that it's all wrong to talk about dentists as people who hurt you . . ."

"She went up to her room?"

"Yes."

"Hers is the Louis XIV room?"

"Indeed it is."

"The yellow room, on the right?"

"Oh, no! That's the Regency room. That's hardly ever used."

"What happened next?"

"I don't know . . . Several minutes went by. Then Madame came down, all excited—"

"Just a moment. How many minutes went by?"

"About twenty . . . At any rate, it was well after five when Madame asked me to call Monsieur at his club and tell him his aunt had had an attack."

"So you phoned him and told him?"

"Yes."

"That's all you said?"

"It's all I knew."

"Then you went upstairs?"

"No, none of us went upstairs. A young doctor came and Madame took him up... It wasn't until seven that we were officially informed of Madame Croizier's death, and not till eight that we all saw her—"

"In the yellow room?"

"No! In the blue room."

A bell rang. Victor groaned, "It's Monsieur. He wants his tea."

And Maigret turned slowly toward the door.

When he was through at the house in the Rue des Recollets, Maigret found his way to the offices of Caen's leading daily newspaper, where he purchased a copy of yesterday's paper.

Over a glass of beer, in a sidewalk café he studied the paper carefully, with particular attention to the obituary column in which Mademoiselle Cecile had learned the news of her aunt's death.

Over a second beer he meditated. Suddenly he said aloud, "Discretion!" Then he rose, paid his bill, flagged a taxi, and rode to the outskirts of town, where the paved streets end.

"The Prosecutor asks you to wait."

Maigret waited. The bench was hard and the hallway was dusty in the Caen courthouse.

It was ten in the morning. A policeman had showed up early at his *pension* (a poor substitute for Madame Maigret and the flat in Paris) with a terse summons from the Prosecutor requesting Maigret's presence at the office at ten sharp.

At ten minutes after ten he rose from his bench and approached the attendant. "Is there someone in the Prosecutor's office?"

"I should think so. He's been there since nine thirty. It's Monsieur Deligeard."

An odd smile drifted across Maigret's lips. Each time he passed before a certain padded door, he heard a murmur of voices. And each time the same smile crossed his lips again.

It was after ten thirty when a bell summoned the attendant, who returned to announce, "The Prosecutor will see you."

And Philippe Deligeard had not yet left. Maigret thrust his hot pipe in his pocket and went in with a slow ponderousness which was at least half assumed. It often struck Maigret's fancy, especially when he was in a particularly good humor, to assume a deliberate air of stupidity—at which times he seemed clumsy, bumbling and even fatter than usual.

"My respects to the Prosecutor. A very good day to you, Monsieur Deligeard."

"Close the door, Inspector. You place me in an extremely delicate and disagreeable situation. What did I recommend to you yesterday?"

"Discretion, Monsieur Prosecutor."

"Did I not also tell you that I placed no reliance on the fables of that girl, that Cecile?"

"And you told me that Monsieur Deligeard was an important man in Caen and we had to be very careful how we handled things where he was involved." Maigret smiled blandly, looking out of the corner of his eye at Philippe.

In full mourning, Monsieur Deligeard seemed even more solemn than the Prosecutor. He affected an air of complete disinterest, not even turning toward the Inspector.

The Prosecutor glared ferociously at the Inspector, as if he suspected the irony that lay behind this oafish affability. He seemed to have some trouble controlling his anger as he ordered, "Sit down! I detest people who pace about!"

"Gladly, Monsieur Prosecutor."

"Where were you at nine o'clock last night?"

"At nine? Let me think . . . Why, I must have been at

Monsieur Deligeard's."

"Without his knowledge! Behind his back! You were there under false pretenses; no search warrant had been issued to you!"

"I had a few questions to ask his servants."

"That is exactly why Monsieur Deligeard has come here to bring charges against you. Those charges, I am forced to admit, are completely justified. You have overstepped your rights. If you needed to question the servants, you should have notified their employer of the fact; that is elementary. You understand me?"

"Certainly, Monsieur Prosecutor." And Maigret maliciously lowered his eyes like a petty civil servant caught in an error.

"That is not all! What follows is far more serious—so serious that I cannot yet foresee all the repercussions which your actions will provoke in high places. After you had complaisantly listened to, solicited, and I may even say provoked malicious gossip from the servants, you left the house; but it was not long before you re-entered by another door. I suppose you do not deny this?"

Maigret sighed humbly.

"What key did you use to open the garden door? Was it perchance Cecile Ledru who

lent it to you? I advise you to weigh carefully the consequences of your answer."

"I didn't have a key to the little door. I really wasn't even planning to go into the garden. I just wanted to know how they brought in the body..."

"What's that?" Both the Prosecutor and Philippe rose abruptly, one as pale as the other.

"I'll tell you all about that in a minute, if you want me to. But about the door: I saw that it had a childish simple lock. Any honest pass-key ought to be able to open it. I wanted to make sure, so I tried it. It was a dark night. The garden was deserted. I noticed that it wasn't far to the garage. Now, I didn't want to disturb Monsieur Deligeard for such a trifle, especially in his sorrow; so I just went over to look at the mud spots Arsene was talking about."

The Prosecutor frowned. Philippe, his gloves in his hand, started to speak, but Maigret left him no opportunity.

"That's all... I know I shouldn't have done it. I ask your pardon and I'll try to justify myself as best I can."

"You confess to a violation of the code! You, a police inspector—"

"I can't say how sorry I am, Monsieur Prosecutor... If I hadn't been so careful not to

disturb Monsieur Deligeard—I knew he'd just had his tea sent up—I might have asked him some questions—"

"That will do! I may add that I do not care for this tone of mockery which you seem to feel you have the right to assume. I am forwarding today, to the Ministry of Police, Monsieur Deligeard's charges against you. I believe we may now, until further notice, consider this incident closed. I trust that I have given you every possible satisfaction."

"Thank you, my dear Prosecutor. This man's conduct has been an outrage. I assure you that it is only my regard for the reputation of the police that restrains me from taking even stronger measures."

The Prosecutor received Monsieur Deligeard's hand with cordial warmth and hastened to show him to the door.

"Again thank you. I'll be seeing you soon, I trust?"

"I'll be at the funeral tomorrow, Monsieur Deligeard, and I hope—"

Suddenly they heard Maigret's voice peacefully observing, "Monsieur Prosecutor for the Republic, I should like, if you'd allow, to ask this man one question. Just one."

The Prosecutor frowned. Deligeard, already on the threshold, paused auto-

matically, and Maigret murmured, "Could you tell me, monsieur, if you will go to Caroline's funeral?"

The Prosecutor was astonished at the effect of these words. In one instant Philippe's face seemed to fall apart.

Still placid, too placid, Maigret closed the door.

"You can see that we aren't really through yet. I beg your pardon for detaining you, but I'm only afraid it won't be for long enough."

"Inspector—" the Prosecutor began.

"Don't be afraid. This Caroline doesn't mean that I'm planning, as the papers say, to unveil the secrets of private life. She isn't a kept woman or a working girl seduced by Monsieur Deligeard. It's all perfectly respectable; she's his old nurse..."

"I must ask you to explain..."

"As lucidly as I can without wasting your time and without showing you where it all happened... I'll begin, if you wish, with The Mystery of the Yellow Room, which must surely bring back pleasant memories of your boyhood reading. And this yellow room was the basis of all my discoveries; or rather, it confirmed my suspicions and allowed me to proceed—Stop looking at the door, Monsieur

Deligeard! It's no use."

"I am waiting," the Prosecutor sighed, playing with a letter opener.

"You must know that on the second floor of the house in the Rue des Recollets, Madame Josephine Croizier occupied the bedroom on the left, called the Louis XIV room, which had pale blue hangings. Now, at a few minutes to five, Josephine Croizier entered the house in the best of health, exchanged a pleasantry or two with the butler, and went up to her room. Which is to say, the blue room."

"Now when Doctor Lievin answered the telephone summons at five ten, he was shown into the bedroom on the right, the Regency room, which is furnished in a lovely yellow. And in this room the poor old lady lay, already undressed and in her night clothes, without even a trace of the disorder which follows a hasty undressing. What is your opinion?"

"Go on!" the lawyer said dryly.

"Nor was this the only mystery involved. Here's another: Young Doctor Lievin, who has only just come to the district and who treats poor people for a ten-franc consultation fee, is summoned to the elegant mansion of the Deligeards in preference to any other practitioner. He finds that

the death took place at around four fifteen. Who's lying? The doctor, or the butler who saw Madame Croizier come in a little before five? And if it's the butler, the dentist must be lying too; he states that at four fifteen the old lady of Bayeux was in his office."

"I don't understand . . ."

"Patience! I didn't understand it either, at first. Any more than I understood why Monsieur Deligeard, who left his house earlier than usual that day, did not reach his club until five fifteen."

"Sometimes a man walks faster or slower . . ." This defense came from the Prosecutor; Deligeard, his face drained of color, sat motionless.

"Then answer this question, Monsieur Prosecutor. Monsieur Philippe had hardly reached the club when his butler phoned him that his aunt had had an attack. That was all the butler said, because it was as much as he knew. Then Monsieur Deligeard went back to the card-room, shocked, and announced that his aunt had just died."

The Prosecutor cast an unpleasant look at Philippe, who sat motionless.

"Now for the secondary questions: Why, on that particular day, had Monsieur Deligeard given his chauffeur the day off on the pretext of a

coming trip? Coincidence? All right. Why does he take the car out at two in the afternoon, and then leave it outside? Where do he and his wife go between two and three?"

"To the bedside of a sick woman!" Philippe suddenly answered.

"To the bedside—exactly—of Caroline, of Caroline who lives on the outskirts of town, which accounts for the mud. And I can prove that that mud comes from in front of the lime-kiln, across from Caroline's house."

As if mechanically, Maigret had begun to load his pipe and pace up and down the office.

"We are confronted, my dear Prosecutor, with one of the basest, meanest crimes I have ever encountered—at the same time almost a perfect crime—a crime predicated on the assumption that there cannot possibly be more than a token investigation into a superficially plausible death of a leading citizen of a provincial town.

"Philippe Deligeard has never done a blessed thing in his life but marry a rich wife, live on a grand scale, and speculate with so little judgment that he lost her entire fortune. For three years he's been in desperate straits; and his only resource is his aunt, who refuses to help him.

"It's obvious. It's simple!



"Monsieur Deligeard will not contradict me when I say that there were days, despite the grand life he led, when there wasn't a hundred francs of cash money in the house.

"You can't learn a profession or a trade at his age. You can't change your way of living overnight.

"The aunt is old. In spite of that disquieting girl Cecile Ledru, she won't disinherit her nephew—especially since my fine Cecile doesn't approve of it. But just to make sure, Philippe drops a hint to the old lady that the girl is somewhat less pure than the driven snow...

"You're following me, Monsieur Prosecutor? You might say that the murder is already decided upon, out of sheer necessity: Josephine Croizier has to die if the Deligeards are to go on living according to their tastes.

"On the other hand, if it's easy enough to push someone over the borderline between life and death, it's a tough job to hide the cause of death from the doctors. Particularly in a case of inheritance, and above all in the provinces, poison is risky; it's the first thing the gossips will think of, and everybody knows that the Deligeards are penniless. Shooting's impossible, a knife leaves traces.

"As I say, the murder is already decided upon. All that's lacking is opportunity—the opportunity to do away with the old lady with no risks.

"And then, all of a sudden, there's the opportunity.

"Philippe has an old nurse, Caroline, just about Madame Croizier's age, who lives alone in a house just outside of town and who has no relatives. She's had several heart attacks. Now the Deligeards get word that she's had another. They go to see her at two in the afternoon, and come back an hour later knowing that Caroline hasn't two hours to live.

"The arrangement of the house favors their plans, but still they're careful to overlook no detail.

"Madame Deligeard leaves at once by the back door, walks to Caroline's—it isn't far—and holds her bedside vigil until the old nurse dies around four fifteen.

"Philippe does not leave the house until his usual hour—a little earlier because of his impatience. He finds his car around the corner, drives to Caroline's, loads the body in the car, and brings his wife back with him.

"The two of them, still using the back door, bring the body in and set it up in the yellow room on the second floor.

"As far as the servants know, Madame Deligeard has not left the house; her husband is on his way to the club.

"They are in the house, waiting for the aunt to return. She must come soon . . . She does, she enters her bedroom—the blue room—and is killed on the spot.

"All that is left is for Philippe to go to his club—by the back door, in his car—to create an alibi. He is to drive back in the car later, explaining his prompt return probably by saying that he took a taxi.

"The doctor is carefully chosen because he knows neither the house nor Josephine Croizier. Madame shows him Caroline's body; he quite correctly diagnoses natural death and signs the certificate. The same business later with the medical examiner.

"Take the nurse's body back to her house late that night, and the job's done."

There was a silence. The Prosecutor studied his letter opener as he asked, "But what made you think of Caroline?"

"Logic! The two doctors could not possibly have examined the body of Josephine Croizier. So I bought the next day's paper. I read the list of deaths. I was certain I'd find at least one old lady. I found her,

I investigated, and when I learned her connection with the Deligeards, the case was as good as over. Her neighbors will testify to various comings and goings by car that day; they didn't think anything about it because they knew the old lady's former employers often came to see her. Possibly the one thing in his life that's to Philippe Deligeard's credit."

The silence was heavy. Then, with a sudden rap of the letter opener, the Prosecutor asked hesitantly, "Do you confess, Philippe Deligeard?"

"I will answer only in the presence of my attorney."

The traditional formula . . . His face was bloodless. He faltered and stumbled as he tried to get up. Maigret had to bring him a glass of water.

The autopsy on Josephine Croizier revealed that her heart was in excellent condition, and that she had been clumsily killed, first by attempted strangulation with a corset lace, then, doubtless because she was still struggling, by two knife wounds.

"I am compelled to congratulate you, Inspector," the Prosecutor admitted with a glacial smile. "You are indeed the star performer that you are said to be. Nevertheless, I must confess to you that your methods, in a

small city, are perilous."

"Which means I won't last long at Caen?"

"It is indeed true that—"

"Thanks."

"But—"

"I haven't been too happy here myself. My wife's waiting for me in Paris. All I hope is that your Caen jury won't be so

impressed by the luxurious mansion of that blackguard Philippe that they'll forget to ask for the death penalty."

Deliberately Maigret struck a match, held it to his pipe, breathed in deeply, and launched a vast cloud of smoke into the sacrosanct office of the Prosecutor of Caen.



# Philip Wylie

## Invitation to Murder (Murderers Welcome)

*Captain Robert O. Bailey was a tycoon by the time he was forty-two, and every dollar of his millions had been earned by his own brains and brawn. He was a tough, courageous adventurer in life. So when two attempts to murder him failed, Captain Bailey, primarily a man of action, decided on a bold and unusual course.*

*He invited all the possible suspects—ten people who had cause to kill him or who would benefit from his death—to his lonely lodge in the North Woods. Then he isolated them for two weeks—four hundred miles from the nearest habitation—and invited his enemy (who? which one?) to murder him. It was as if Captain Bailey challenged: "Kill me—if you can!"*

*One of three short novels, complete in this anthology . . .*

### **Detective: CAPTAIN ROBERT O. BAILEY**

Bailey expected that, at any moment, the man in the bow of the canoe would turn around and calmly shoot at him.

That was why, on the previous night, he had gone through Mitchell's gear, carefully placing six blanks in the magazine of his rifle. The wadding might sting, and at canoe length he might get a powder burn. But he couldn't be killed. Mitchell couldn't

paddle back to the lodge with his body and say, "A horrible accident has occurred."

Bailey—Captain Robert O. Bailey—grinned to himself and tingled with a sense of impending excitement. This was not the narrowest squeak in his life. It couldn't be—not in the career of a Texas youth who had begun fighting at six because his middle name was Osbert and the kids at school had found it out—not in the

past of a black-haired, black-eyed young man who had flown over the German lines and subsequently dropped home-made bombs (dynamite and horseshoes in gasoline cans) on Central American insurrectoes and who, after that, had mined tin and built dams and started corporations, and reached the age of forty-two a multimillionaire, now chained to a skyscraper desk most of the year, handsome, eligible, fabulous. Not the narrowest squeak—but one of the most interesting.

The man who made the canoe bow-heavy was one of the Captain's guests. K. Y. Mitchell. As reckless as Bailey—even richer and more powerful—older—whale-necked, bald-headed, trumpet-voiced. A piratical figure in the world of finance.

Bailey dug his paddle quietly. The river was narrow—a crystal liaison between two lakes lost in the Canadian wilderness. Sunlight poured horizontally over the spruce tops. The air was clear and still. A beaver, anticipating their arrival in his glassy domain, spanked the water with his tail. As they came around the next bend they could see the ripples. Bailey looked for him in the water. He saw the torpedo streak of a pike and undulant

weeds along the pebbly bottom; but the beaver was gone.

He began to wonder if Mitchell would shoot after all. Somebody had been trying to kill him. And Mitchell's reasons were sufficient. Bailey had caught him twice in stock pools, and Bailey's recent decision to turn over the bulk of his businesses to his employees would cost Mitchell a fortune in depreciated stock. Besides, Mitchell had always openly disliked him—regarded him as a dangerous upstart. Mitchell was temperamentally opposed to turning anything over to one's employees. And recently the Captain had spanked Mitchell's daughter in a night club—spanked her hard, for being drunk and disorderly. The newspapers had carried the story on their front pages. And Mitchell had never protested.

Bailey batted a mosquito from his face and grinned. It was, probably, his companion who had made those two attempts on his life. And now he'd make another. The Captain had staged the opportunity for just that purpose. He didn't mind having people try to kill him—in twenty-five years he'd grown used to that. But hitherto he had always known who his enemy was. Now he couldn't be sure. In a few minutes he might be.

Mitchell turned toward him, his ponderous face amused. "No chance of a moose in this creek?"

"Always a chance. But there are some high-bush huckleberries at the lake mouth, and from them we can see the whole shoreline. That gives us plenty of territory. They haven't started to run yet, and there's a pretty good chance of catching a bunch of them feeding on lily roots. You saw those tubers floating along a while back?"

"Yes. They looked good to eat, too."

"Bitter. And the moose don't feed on the bulbs. They grab a mouthful of fine roots, slosh out the muck, and eat them."

"Oh." Mitchell picked up his rifle. "What do you want to bet I don't miss my first shot?"

Captain Bailey thought of the blanks. "A dollar."

Mitchell's violent temper showed in the fact that he regarded the suggested bet as an insult, and not as the joking suggestion of a man who, in any case, didn't like to gamble on sports. "A dollar! The hell you say! Make it a thousand!"

"All right." The Captain's black eyes were sardonic. "A thousand." Mitchell had said "his first shot." That didn't mean at a moose—necessarily.

The man in the bow levered a shell into the breech. "Funny thing," he said placidly. "Got up at dawn this morning. Took a little walk. Started looking over my stuff." He smiled. "Somebody tried to play a joke on me. Loaded my gun with blanks."

Bailey's face did not change. In fact, it was faintly amused. There was a familiar cold spot on his spine. It had gone cold many times—when shells were bursting—when there was a panic on the floor of the Stock Exchange—once, when a supposedly extinct volcano began to rumble. "We have plenty of practical jokers at the Lodge," he said.

Mitchell shrugged. He wasn't looking for moose any longer. He threw one leg over a thwart, cocked his gun, and inhaled. "Wonderful morning, Bailey. You know, today I almost like you. And I've spent so much time hating your guts. You're a fool, and a dangerous one." Bailey glanced down at his own rifle. No good to jump for it. "What I ought to do," the big man continued, "is to knock you off, here and now, and say it was an accident. A whole lot of people would be grateful to me."

Bailey was gazing at the bottom—apparently fascinated by its flora and fauna, but

actually gauging the depth. His voice was gentle. "You'd probably get away with it. I'm ready to bet that thousand that—"

He tipped over the canoe.

He hit the water moving toward Mitchell. He saw him come down and lose his gun. So he didn't interfere. When he regained the surface he grabbed a gunwale. Then, and only then, he let go of his own gun.

Mitchell coughed, spit, and choked. "You clumsy lout!" he bellowed across the canoe's keel. "I believe you were afraid I'd win that bet! I believe you were the guy who spiked my gun!"

"I thought I saw a beaver," Bailey answered. "Leaned over too far. Let's push this thing ashore. We'll have to paddle like sin to keep warm. We can send the guides back here to dive for the guns. Come on."

Close, he thought.

But it was Mitchell, all right. Mitchell the rat—trying to kid him along till he got ready to murder him. What the hell did Mitchell think Bailey was? A child?

The other guests were having breakfast on the porch when they came up—soggy, dripping, with squishing shoes. Handsome brunette Mary Brookhart. Red-headed actress Bernetta Smith. Jolly Mrs. Walters and her gaunt

husband, Bailey's general manager. Carey MacGregor, the Captain's quiet, perpetual sidekick and partner. His cousin Ralph Bailey, kept from being a penniless drifter only by the Captain's generosity—a family feeling for which he could not forgive himself. They all thought the debacle of the morning's hunt was very funny.

They laughed even harder when Mitchell, still furious, insisted that Bailey had done it on purpose—to keep from losing a bet.

Bailey chuckled, denied everything, and went through the trophy-hung, cedar-paneled living room to his own quarters upstairs. He rang for his butler-valet and began to undress, staring through an immense skylight to the blue sky and then through the front windows across the lake.

His man knocked on the door and came in. "I'll lay out some fresh clothes, sir."

"Yeah, and look, Rogers." He lowered his voice. "I think you can narrow down your observations to Mr. Mitchell!"

The butler-valet nodded. "I assumed as much—when I saw you both come in wet."

"I think he was going to shoot me."

"Precisely, sir."

"And he had discovered the blanks. Replaced them."



"So I judged."

Bailey went into the shower. He turned on the hot water. It felt good to have hot water and electric lights in the middle of nowhere. Money was a wonderful thing, at that. He began to sing. Rogers was a damn good butler—for a detective.

Before he had finished dressing, he heard the motors of an airplane. He heard them first. Rogers, in the kitchen, heard them next. Then the guides in the servants' dining room—they were also detectives. The upstairs maid and the lady's maid, also trained to watch and listen, next caught the remote purring. By the time the guests realized that someone was flying toward Lonely Lodge, Bailey was already halfway to the dock.

A big silver amphibian came in without circling. Nelson Dudley, Bailey's lawyer, thrust his curly head and wide shoulders through the door. "Hello, Rob, my lad!"

"Hello, Nelse."

"Got a surprise for you."

The Captain had not expected any more surprise than the arrival by air of his lawyer, an old friend—a friend of many vicissitudes. He said, "Yeah?" blithely.

Dudley hopped ashore and helped out a young woman and a middle-aged man.

It was a surprise, all right. Evelyn Case, his fiancée, and her father. The last person in the world he would have wanted on this particular house party. A gray-eyed girl, Park Avenue bred. She held up her mouth and returned his kiss with somewhat artificial enthusiasm. "Darling! What on earth ever made you think you could throw a party without me! I'm practically wild! I *love* the North Woods—and you know it! I persuaded father to persuade Nelse to take us along. He had to—otherwise we'd have chartered our own plane! If this is some sort of bachelor fiesta—the last roundup before we do Lohengrin together—then I'm glad I'm here to spoil it! I wouldn't have minded a *bit*—if you'd told me all about it, instead of *sneaking away*—"

Bailey was inept at artifice against a feminine antagonist. He shook hands with Evelyn's father and said uncomfortably, "Mostly business. No last roundup. You ought to know me better. Thought you'd be bored—"

She took his arm. They went through the trees and the sunlight toward the porch. Bailey had ordered one extra breakfast to be kept waiting for Nelson Dudley. Now he ordered two more. He introduced Evelyn and her father in an

"I-think-you've-all-met-before" manner.

Mary Brookhart nodded rudely. Bernetta Smith smiled, then left the table.

Evelyn whispered, "I knew it! Weren't you practically engaged to Miss Smith once? And Mary Brookhart, too?"

"Shhhh—" he said.

The second sitting for breakfast was not a happy one.

It was ten o'clock before Nelson Dudley had an opportunity to talk to the Captain alone. He found him at the dock giving orders about the two planes. Dudley nodded him toward the trees and they walked away from the elaborate Lonely Lodge.

"You didn't seem to be particularly pleased that I brought Evelyn," the lawyer said. "I can understand that—seeing who is here. What the devil is the idea?"

Bailey stalked over the pine needles. Suddenly he laughed and said to his companion, "Nelse, make me out a new will, hunh?"

"What in hell is the matter with you?"

"I was going to tell you as soon as you came. Did you notice my servants?"

"Sure—I noticed the whole place. It's sheer luxury! How do you get oil for your power plant, though?"

"Fly it in. All my servants are detectives."

The lawyer stared. "Why?"

"It's a long sad story." The Captain took a knife from his pocket, pried a hard piece of gum from a spruce tree, and began to chew it. "I tried to see you before I started out on this party—but you'd run up to Albany—"

"Washington."

"Don't be fussy about details. Look here, Nelse. A month ago I left my office building and a dame in a car tried to hit me as I crossed the street. Tried hard, mind you. Didn't recognize her—and the license was muddy. Got that? All right. A week later I had my lunch sent up to my office but before it arrived I went into a board meeting. We had a row—over turning my business over to my employees—sent out for sandwiches and I forgot the meat and potatoes cooling out in the front office. When the meeting was over, I wasn't hungry. The food had been sitting, unguarded, for more than an hour. Miss Deane, my secretary, brought it in. I refused it, so she nibbled on the pie. A few minutes later she started to sweat and jerk. Turned pale. Went out like a light. I ran her over to a hospital and they pulled her through. Strychnine. That pie

was loaded with it—and meant for me.”

“Oh-oh!”

“There are Exhibits A and B. I went into a huddle with myself and realized someone was trying to rub me out. It’s been tried before. So I decided to find out who was monkeying around, and monkey back. I couldn’t call the cops—my suspects are too important, and my case is too delicate. I did try a detective agency, but when I asked them to put a man on K. Y. Mitchell—”

“You nitwit!”

The Captain grinned. “That’s what they said. They said you couldn’t shadow the President of the United States or the Secretary of State or Henry Ford or, by the same token, K. Y. Mitchell.”

“So you asked him up here! Damn it, Rob, some day you’re going to get into trouble.”

Bailey made a wry face. “Maybe. Some day. Anyhow, it appeared that my trouble was all my own—nobody wanted any part of it. That was when I went out looking for you. But you were in Washington, so I was left to what we will call my own resources. Nelse, who would want to murder me?”

The lawyer shrugged and pondered. “Well, Mitchell—though he’d use agents—”

“Sure. He wouldn’t dress up

as a woman and try to run me down. He’s no pie poisoner. He hates me. I larrupped his precious daughter—the drunk! All right—anybody else?”

Nelson Dudley’s face was blank—and then, slowly, it became incredulous. “Good God, man, you don’t mean to say that all these people here, all these guests—”

The Captain sat down and gestured. “Nice mossy stone,” he said. He grinned. “No chance of anybody stalking us here—too many twigs. All right. You begin to discern my notion. All these guests, as you say.”

Bailey then spoke rapidly. “Mitchell could want to kill me—badly. And Ralph could—that damn cousin of mine is strictly N.G. He knows he has a big claim on my dough and he knows there’ll be a lot less if I hand the Bailey corporations back to the men who built them up.

“You know Logan Walters, my general manager? Smart. But three years ago he embezzled a hundred and fifty grand. I think his wife is aces—and more for her than for him I saw him through. He nearly went to pieces—reformed—the works. But you know those guys. I have something on him. Besides, if I step out as I plan to, he may lose his job. Motive for killing me? Plenty—

if he's been brooding for three years. And he's the type.

"I also asked Carey, who has been through hell and high water with me. That hurt. He's like a brother—or was. But when we started piling up dough together he got money-crazy. I've sort of carried him—ever since he was a kid. And since my decision to haul out of business he's been openly frantic. So, I put him on the list.

"That makes four. But it was a woman driving that car—probably—and a woman poisons more often than a man. Right? Well, there have been plenty of angry ladies in my past. Regrettable, but true. Remember, I nearly married Bernetta Smith?"

"Vividly. You had to go to Africa to duck the fireworks."

"India."

"And she's here."

"Sure. Because she's kept on writing me mash notes. Because she's one of those flaming female women. That's why I ducked—too much temperament and emotion. There was one more reason for asking that red-headed actress. She was in my office, trying to see me, the morning a person or persons unknown doused the pie with strychnine."

Dudley nodded glumly.

"Last—and by no means

least—beautiful Mary Brookhart. Nelse, my boy, she's already had two husbands. Both of them died in accidents at which Mary alone was present. One of them was a diplomat. In Bolivia. I was there, too. Mary put her number on me—third husband, I suspect, was what she had in mind. Anyhow, I beat Mary and a tough bird named Shail to my tin mines down there, and I gave her the go-by at a party in the mountains a few weeks later and the dear gal tried to separate my head from my shoulders with a machete shortly afterward."

"Why didn't you have her locked up?"

Bailey shrugged. "It was just temper. However, she settled down in New York this fall and began to telephone. Another thing. When I licked her in the race for tin, she got the idea I was a good businessman. She invested most of what she has in my companies. Now that I'm easing out, and the prices of my stocks are falling, Mary stands to lose—a lot. And she likes money. You may have heard."

"Rumors," Dudley answered ironically. He picked up a twig and broke it. He ran his fingers through his curly two-colored hair. "Is that all you can tell me, Rob?"

"Just about. By hook or

crook I persuaded them to come up here. I filled the place with dicks. I figured I'd give each and every one a chance to do me in—under circumstances that would make it easy for them to go through an inquest afterward. Only—I'd be ready—and I'm known to be hard to kill. The way I doped it out, I would force whoever was really after me to show his—or her—hand. Besides, I didn't like being hunted in the city. I'm used to the outdoors. I can handle myself better here."

Dudley grinned. "Why didn't you invite me, you suspicious rat? You know I'll get a nice slice out of disposing of your estate. And you know that my affairs aren't so hot. I could use the cash. Or did you figure I'd ask to come up, when I heard about it?"

Bailey laughed. "Anyhow, I'm sure glad you're here."

"When women in cars started chasing you around elevated pillars, and someone starts poisoning your food, you should have phoned me right away. Rob, you jackass, this isn't Central America—or the Punjab. I might expect that you'd cook up some crazy idea like having a gala party for your own murderer! But if you think you'll get home safe this way—"

The Captain interrupted. "It wasn't so cockeyed. Mitchell

tried to shoot me this morning."

"Mitchell!"

"Well, practically. I didn't let him get that far. You see, the gun was loaded."

Dudley stared at his friend. "Good God!"

"I think he knows I know. And I think he'll try again."

"If he has any sense he'll beat it."

The Captain shook his head. "No. No, he won't beat it. I don't relish being murdered and I'd dearly like to get the bird who's trying to get me. Built that way. So I want you to make me out a new will—something that'll stir up action. We'll talk about it openly and say it's going to be in force as soon as I get back. Fix me a will that'll mean my business is going to be transferred—even if I'm dead—as soon as you get back to the city. In the meantime we'll keep Mitchell here. You see—" he looked at his watch—"in just a few minutes those planes are going to head south—to the surprise of one and all. And they won't be back for two weeks. Just a lack of consideration on my part. Short-sightedness."

"Sure. Hold it—someone's coming!"

Bailey squinted through the trees. He looked hard. "Nobody I know. Must be Mrs. Walters"

personal maid. I didn't see them arrive. I was out fishing with Ralph. You can imagine. I put a gun in the boat near him. Figured if he dove for it I could beat him. Had a forty-five under my arm. He didn't try, though. Pretty girl, isn't she?"

The lawyer was shaking his head—half in deprecation, half in awe. Rob Bailey had a reputation for being a fool—a successful fool, a dramatic fool, a flying and shooting fool. All sorts of fool. But this North Woods house party was certainly his greatest folly. Presently he followed the Captain's eyes. "Pretty! A maid, you say? She's among wolves. And I am the pack leader!" He called to the girl who was approaching diffidently, "Hello, there!"

The girl said, "Hello." She walked toward them across the pine needles. Both men watched her. To Dudley she was a pretty girl in a gray silk dress—a brunette, neither too large nor too small, not dumb but obviously not self-assertive. But to Captain Bailey she was something more—and a consciousness of it invaded his preoccupation with his own murder, erased momentarily even his honorable engagement to Evelyn Case. An unidentified sense made him feel that she was singularly moving, exciting, mysterious—that he had known

her—that she needed help. So when she came near he looked not at her uniform, as his friends did, but into her eyes, and his own gaze was friendly and strongly personal.

"It's a nice day." The provocative tone of Dudley's voice angered Bailey.

"Yes," the girl said. She was looking at Bailey—as if she had heard of him and wanted to see him. "Very nice. I hope I haven't disturbed you."

"On the contrary," the lawyer answered. "Welcome addition. Just seeing you around will make Lonely Lodge a lot less lonely."

She neither flushed nor simpered. She looked gravely at the lawyer and said, "Thank you," so flatly that he was abashed.

The Captain felt anger. A moment before he could not have imagined himself interfering with his friend's intention to flirt with somebody's personal maid. "Come on back to the house, Nelse."

"I will not," the lawyer replied, smiling. "I'm for walking with—by the way?"

"Beth. But I'm not walking any farther, thanks."

"Come on! We have work to do." The Captain's voice was imperative.

Dudley nodded toward the girl and joined Bailey. "What's

the idea?" he asked with pique. "Since when have you been a defender of the faith?"

"Since I saw that dame."

"Oh. You know her?"

"Never saw her before in my life."

"Then what the devil—?"

"I'm irritable," the Captain answered. "Who wouldn't be in my shoes?"

They walked toward the house. As they went the two planes roared into the air. They caught a glimpse of them through the tree tops, winging south. When they reached other log buildings which surrounded the Lodge, they found the guests on the shore, staring blankly into the sky.

Mitchell bawled across the field, "When do they return, Bailey?"

The Captain winked at the lawyer. "Keep your mouth shut," he muttered, and yelled back, "In two weeks. But don't worry. We have everything we need."

"Two weeks! Don't you realize that it's impossible for me to be cut off for two weeks? Anything could happen in town!"

The Captain had reached his guests. He smiled. "I'm sorry, Mitchell. Didn't think. I'm so used to being in the bush, I guess. Well, there's no way to get them back and it would

take more than two weeks to paddle and portage out!"

The banker was purple.

Mary Brookhart, leaning against the bottom of a rowboat, her eyes speculative, her whole demeanor provocative, said, "Anyhow, pals, it'll give us fourteen days to talk Rob out of doing something that'll cost us all a lot of money." She looked maliciously at Bailey. "We've been discussing you. You know what we think? We think that you deliberately brought us up here, the people who are going to suffer most from the destruction of your business—just so you could see how we would take it. I suppose you realize that you're ruining your cousin and your partner and Mr. Walters—and me, too. Not to mention taking a chunk out of Mitch's bankroll and wrecking his peace of mind?"

The Captain pretended to stare from face to face. "You know, I hadn't thought of that. I'd merely thought that you were all my closest friends." He glanced at Dudley, and the lawyer thought that Bailey's eyelid twitched. The Captain drew a breath and continued, almost pompously, "I'm giving back a few corporations to the men who made them. I've sat on the desert with those men. Fought everything from horse



thieves to rattlesnakes with them. I'm not like you, Mitch. I didn't make mine on a counting board. I made it digging the pipelines and hauling in the generators. I have plenty. Now they're going to get theirs. When the men take over, Carey and Walters can still be bosses—if they're good enough. If not, they don't deserve it."

Evelyn said, "Let's play bridge! You just leave him to me! I'll persuade him."

The Captain ignored her. "You can afford it, Mitch." He looked facetiously at Mary Brookhart. "You've always had too much, my dear. Modest circumstances ought to improve your disposition."

"I suppose I have no rights in the matter?" His cousin Ralph was bitter.

"None!"

"Come on to the house!" Evelyn made her voice inviting. But her eyes, fastened on the Captain, were furious. "We've got fourteen days to play bridge in."

"Fourteen days," Bernetta Smith said sharply, so they all could hear, "in which you're going to have to defend your engagement ring against competitors!"

The group that had hastily formed to watch the departing planes broke up. Nelson Dudley whispered to Bailey, "Nice little

gang of cutthroats you have here! They not only want to kill you, they want to tear your heart out."

After lunch, Evelyn asked Bailey to take her fishing. They paddled out on the lake, with a trolling line and a spoon in the canoe, but they didn't fish. Evelyn waited until they were out of earshot, but only that long, before she began to talk. "I want to know why you asked Bernetta Smith and Mary Brookhart up here," she demanded.

He affected helplessness. "It wasn't a stag party."

"Is it because they were here that you *didn't* invite me!"

"Darling, think—a minute. Would I ask *both* of them if that were true? Don't be jealous—it makes a person stupid. I wanted the men for business reasons. I asked Bernetta and Mary because they're good company—ordinarily. Right now they seem to be having moods."

"What is all this about your retiring from business?"

"Just that."

"But you can't possibly retire at forty-two!"

"I'm not going to quit living, you know. I've sat in an office for six years and I'm sick of walls. We'll have plenty of money."

"But I wanted you to go on



and on—getting bigger and bigger till you were more important, even, than Mr. Mitchell—

“Do you want me to be like Mitch?”

“That’s ridiculous!”

“But I don’t want to ‘on and on.’ I want to marry you and buy a yacht—something that sails as well as steams—and start out for nowhere.”

“That’s all right for a honeymoon.” The picture partially mollified the beautiful girl. “But how about afterward?”

He flicked water from his paddle onto some lily pads. “Ever hear of children? You know. Little kids? Boys and girls? You take ‘em to circuses and teach them to ride ponies? They have dirty faces—”

“Don’t be sickening!”

He looked at her with directness. “See here, Evelyn. I’ve said I love you and I’ve asked you to marry me. What love is—I don’t know. I only know it’s rare, and easily damaged. What I’m telling you is what I mean. I realize that there’s a hell of a lot of icing on you that has to be scraped off to get to the real girl. But I think there’s one underneath and it’s my plan to scrape it off. I might as well begin now. I asked the people who are now here—except you and your

father—for reasons that seem sufficient to me. You’ll have to accept those reasons, without knowing them, simply because I say so.”

She didn’t apologize. She flushed hotly and answered, “Very well, if you want to play tough army sergeant, go ahead.”

Bailey wondered what the Park Avenue girl would do if he sat down beside her and compelled her to kiss him. He wondered what she would do if he spanked her, as he had Mitchell’s daughter. Or dumped her into the water, as he had Mitchell himself. Get mad, probably. Removing the “icing” from Evelyn Case wouldn’t be a cinch.

Still, sinecures weren’t his specialty. He said, “Want to troll?”

She didn’t reply. After a long pause she spoke coldly. “I wish you could have heard your precious guests talking about you while you were out walking with Dudley! You know, Rob, some day somebody just as tough as you is going to walk up and take a shot at you. A lot of those people despise you.”

He grinned. “Really, dear? You know—” he mimicked her tone—“a whole lot of people have already taken shots at me. Most of them are now pushing up daisies.”

"If you didn't have so much money," she answered, "you would be a thoroughly despicable person." The expression on his face made her add, "I don't mean that the way you think! I just mean there's a lot of plain rowdy in you."

"Good quality, I always thought."

"It's disgusting. What you need is a little of what you scornfully call icing."

"How would you like to swim back to the dock?"

"Let's not quarrel!"

"Were we on the point of it?" He swung the canoe around and paddled the girl ashore without saying another word.

Not long after dinner he excused himself. He left his uncomfortable and disgruntled guests in the living room. Their "good nights" were only half polite. And as he went up the stairs he thought with special interest and some amusement of Mitchell sitting at a bridge table. He had certainly provided his killer with adequate equipment.

The main room of the Lodge—fifty feet long, with a huge fireplace at one end—was a veritable armory. There were trophies—skins on the hardwood floor and heads on the walls—and the tools with which they had been taken—racks and closets of guns and pistols. In

addition, he had brought to Lonely Lodge, for decoration, some of the knickknacks he had collected—spears, swords, cutlasses, scimitars, blowguns, flintlocks, maces, foils. There were also hunting knives and archery butts with modern bows and arrows and a hundred other objects—all lethal, or susceptible in an emergency to lethal use.

He went up the stairs and out of sight. Rogers was serving brandy below. Conversation seemed to gain impetus when he vanished.

In the hall he had a glimpse of Mrs. Walters' maid, Beth. She was laying out her mistress' rather elaborate night equipment. Involuntarily he smiled when he saw it—and the girl smiled back, sharing his amusement. He stopped at the boudoir door. "Nevertheless," he said, as if in apology for his mirth, "she's a fine person."

The girl understood. "One of the best," she answered.

Bailey went on, wondering about the feeling that the maid gave him. Twice in one day she had arrested some unidentified part of his mind. He decided it was because she was so attractive. He hadn't expected that kind of attractiveness at Lonely Lodge.

He went to his room and changed, but not into pajamas.

He put on woolen underwear, a flannel shirt, and heavy trousers. On his feet he put moccasins, laced with rawhide. He turned out his lights and rang a bell. Presently, from the hall outside, a man dressed in night clothes stepped into the room. Bailey nodded, but said nothing. The man climbed into Bailey's bed. Then Bailey opened a screen, went out the window, moved silently across the porch roof, dove into the air, caught the limb of a pine tree, and dropped soundlessly to the ground.

For an hour he sat under one of the living-room windows, in the dark, listening to the conversation. Eavesdropping is not a nice business to an honorable man. But neither is murder. When his guests had gone to their rooms he walked into the woods. About two hundred yards from the house he took a sleeping bag from under a tangle of brush, unrolled it, and climbed in. A wildcat squalled far away. A wolf howled. Bailey fell asleep in less than a minute.

He woke at the hour he had planned to wake. The east was gray, but no more. It was the moment when faint visibility makes the comprehension of things more difficult than darkness. He was sleepy—his scheme of spending the nights

outside the house while one of the guide-detectives occupied his bed was going to mean that for two weeks he would be short on sleep. It was chilly. Frost had fallen. But neither his sleepiness nor the coldness was what first impressed the Captain.

He woke instantly and to clear consciousness. He woke with fear. Not of the general peril that threatened him. An immediate sense of tangible wrong in his environment caused him to open his eyes only a slit, and to lie immobile.

His pupils, roving under his almost closed lids, saw his evenly steaming breath, the trees, and the ground around him. Still pretending to be asleep, he turned over and scanned minutely every foot of his shadowy surroundings. He expected to discover a person lurking there, or to hear a twig snap, or the soft slither of concealed approach.

There was nothing. The awakening birds and the gentle slap of waves along the lake shore were the only sounds. To his nostrils came the odor of smoke. Fresh fires were being lighted by the servants.

He put his hand on the butt of his revolver and sat up.

Still he searched. He even carefully probed the tree tops overhead. Then, suddenly, he

observed the source of his nameless agitation. Leading toward the place where he had slept, across the moss and the damp pine needles, were footprints. Bailey crawled out of his sleeping bag and examined them. Pressed needles were still occasionally springing back into position.

A woman had walked to his hiding place from the house—a woman who wore fairly high-heeled shoes. She had stood in front of him, with a tree at hand to conceal herself, for a long time—long enough to change her stance, trampling the ground. She had come toward the place slowly and carefully. She had left it on tiptoe, and at a near run.

Which woman? Had she come to kill him? Had she stood there with, perhaps, a knife—and lost her nerve? Or had he moved in his sleep so that she became frightened and hurried away? Or had a man, wearing woman's shoes, crept up to kill him, expecting that his tracks would hide the author of the crime, and then fled for a similar reason? There was no positive way to tell.

Mitchell, in such small shoes, would have left deeper and more awkward prints. So it wasn't Mitchell. For the first time it ran through the Captain's mind that his own

operatives, the servants, might not be loyal. A man like Mitchell could have learned that they were being hired, and for what reason, and could have arranged to service Lonely Lodge with his, not Bailey's, hirelings.

Dawn was coming rapidly.

Bailey finished his examination of the footprints. He rolled up his sleeping bag and hid it in a new place. His moccasins left no marks.

He walked silently toward the house.

He climbed into the red pine tree that hung over the porch. He crept across the shingles, opened the screen, and stepped into his bedroom.

Through the lessening dimness he saw the figure of the guide, motionless in his bed. The man was evidently asleep. Bad. He had definite orders not to sleep. His duty was to remain awake and watch for any manifestation of the menace which twice had attacked the Captain.

Bailey moved to the bed. The man didn't stir. There was a reason. He had gone to sleep, all right. Lying on his side, with his back to the windows.

And while he lay there, someone had fired an arrow at him—an arrow that had gone through his back, pierced his heart, and killed him. The thing

Bailey had dreaded had happened. Not to him, but to the man he had posted to forestall it.

Bailey felt the body. There was still warmth in it.

He rang a bell. Then he stepped away from the bed and waited. While he waited he thought. When Rogers tapped on his door he had planned what he would do. The detective stepped into the room, his gray eyes showing luminously, his dressing gown tied tight around him, his body expressive of alert deference. "Oh," he whispered, "you're up and back, Captain."

"Take a look."

Rogers looked. He walked over to the window. He examined the screen. There was no hole in it. "Somebody came through and shot from about here," he said.

The Captain's voice was cold and swift. "Or else opened the screen and shot from the roof. Can you take fingerprints?"

"No, sir. Haven't the equipment."

"Anybody on the staff?"

"No, sir. We're all in the information department—observers. You'd need one of our specialists—or the police—to go over your bows. I presume you were thinking of that?"

"The bows—the arrow—the

screen." Bailey still spoke commandingly, but with a sinking sense. There were to be no police for this murder. No trained men to hunt for fingerprints and hairs and specks of dust. His own employees—if, indeed, they were his and could be trusted—were clever enough in their spheres; but their skill was espionage, not detection.

"I want you to get a couple of your men, Rogers. Carry this fellow out to the toolshed and lock his body there. Don't be seen. I want no one but the men you pick to know about this until I give the word."

Rogers answered after an instant. "You can't do that, sir. The law requires—"

"This isn't Broadway and Forty-second Street! There isn't any law here. Don't you realize that we're alone up here for two weeks? We won't have any help. And our trouble is just beginning. We've got to bury that poor guy ourselves—and find the man who killed him ourselves—or the woman—"

Rogers was used to orders. He said, "You're quite right, Captain. I'll have Stacey's body hidden. One other thing. Whoever killed Stacey, it was not Mr. Mitchell."

There was light enough to make the surprise on Bailey's face plain. "You're sure?"

"He went to bed at twelve twenty. You will recall that you told me to confine my personal attention to him? Since then he has made no move without my knowledge. He read until five minutes past two, then went to sleep and is still sleeping. He left his night light on. Miller, the chef's helper, has watched him all night from the top of the powerhouse."

"What about the others?"

"We were confining ourselves to Mr. Mitchell—on your orders."

"Damn my orders! Find out who was up, when the lights in various rooms went out—all you can."

"Yes, sir."

"And Rogers. When everyone is assembled for breakfast—and be sure that everyone *is* assembled—notify me. I want to see every face when I appear. I want you to be watching. I won't be expected—by *somebody*. We've got to see who that is, when I show up. Furthermore, make a mental note of anybody asking about me, why I'm late to breakfast, and so on."

Rogers nodded. A few moments later Rogers, with the chef and one of the other guides, put the body in a large wicker clothes hamper, after wrapping it in sheets. Thus, even if an early riser confronted

them in the halls, their burden would seem natural.

Bailey sat in his room until the sun rose. Then, because there was nothing better to do while his guests woke and bathed in the lake, rang for coffee and chattered to each other, he sent for a magnifying glass that was part of a moth-and-butterfly-collecting outfit and went over every inch of his room. He found nothing, learned nothing.

At eight o'clock, after Rogers had given him the signal, he went downstairs. He walked into the dining room so quietly that his guests did not see him until he was at the head of the table.

His arrival occasioned, so far as he could tell, no surprise whatever. Everyone said "Good morning" and "Hello."

Evelyn said, "Come here, darling! Your tie's crooked."

She fixed his tie.

Walters, his cavernous-eyed general manager, said with forced joviality, "You look as if you'd slept well, Rob! I didn't. All night I listened to things scream and burble. Bad as the jungle—"

Mary Brookhart smiled pleasantly. "Good morning, dear."

His partner, Carey MacGregor, suggested a little hunting. "Everybody here

wants to talk business. Me, I want moose meat for dinner."

Mitchell turned to him. "I'm your man—for one. Takes a night or two to get used to the woods. Had to read myself to sleep. Feel crusty."

Bernetta Smith, looking fresh and contented, said, "Ralph and I are going to get out the archery butts. He says he's good. I was on a team once."

That brought Bailey's eyes to the actress first, then his cousin. "How about it?" he asked the others. "Who's good with a bow and arrow?"

No one else acknowledged any proficiency.

Nelson Dudley suggested tennis. "The court's not in half bad shape, considering."

Mary said she'd play—as soon as she changed her shoes.

Bailey looked, when he could, at all the women's shoes. No one was wearing high heels. He had already decided to make a search of the bedrooms. A high heel with moss on it, or a pine needle, or even damp earth, might help.

He sat down and began to eat. His guests started a discussion of the cries audible at night, arguing about their identity and giving ludicrous imitations.

His dramatic appearance had brought him no clue. It was as

if the murderer had not been present. He pondered. Was the murderer so brilliant an actor? Had Bernetta, for instance, in her invitation to Ralph and her boasted archery prowess, forged for herself an inverted alibi?—the implication that someone who had just used a bow and arrow for murder would scarcely be eager to use them for play? He hadn't yet looked at the bows. The one used would doubtless have been returned, wiped clean of fingerprints. There would be an arrow missing, but would that tell anything? All night any of them could have entered the living room, and a fire would have been burning to light the way.

Then he thought of a new possibility. Anyone who could have lifted the screen to shoot an arrow into his room could have gone in afterward to be sure of its effect. The killer, in that case, would have realized his mistake, expected Bailey at breakfast, and had time to nerve himself—to greet his appearance with composure. That was it! That was why his return from a "death" that somebody knew about had occasioned no abrupt pallor, no tremor, no departure from the table, no hysterical effort at conversation. The murderer doubtless knew that he had killed the wrong man.



Bailey glanced up at Rogers who, with an almost imperceptible shake of his head, indicated that he had observed no suspicious reactions.

"I would like to speak to you all," the Captain said, "as soon as breakfast is over."

They asked him why, but he made them wait.

When they had gone into the living room, discomfited by their host's sudden stiffness, Bailey took Rogers aside. "I want all your gang to listen to every word I say and stick to it as the truth. Make them understand that our only hope of catching the murderer is to pretend that the killing of Stacey was an accident. Then the person who did it will know that we know it wasn't. See?"

After that he went into the main room.

"What's this all about?" Walters asked. "We want to be off."

"I'm having the servants in. Then I'll explain."

Nelson Dudley whistled softly. "Somebody miss something, Rob?"

When they were all assembled—the guests, the guides, the chef, his helper, the housemaid, the ladies' maid, Mrs. Walters' maid, Beth, the engineer, the handyman, Rogers—twenty-one people in all—the Captain, who had been

sitting beside a table, stood up. It gave the meeting a formal aspect and stopped all conversation.

Bailey glanced around the room and then said, "Last night somebody here apparently decided that it would be exciting to go for a hunt in the dark—with a bow and arrow as a weapon. It may have been early morning. The point is that Stacey, one of my guides, was evidently mistaken for quarry and shot. The arrow killed him. We've moved his body to the toolshed. We'll have to bury him. Whoever made that blunder put the bow back, probably after removing fingerprints, and went to bed. Perhaps" — he turned to the servants standing expressionlessly in the doorway—"one of you decided to get in a little sport."

He again addressed them all. "We're alone. For two weeks. We can't call in police. We're civilized and intelligent. Accidents have happened before on hunting trips. Now I'm not going to question anyone. It would be useless. I want the person who went out for a little excitement—and had an accident and tried to hide it—to confess. Otherwise, it's going to be an ugly thing. I think Nelson can guarantee that anyone who is guilty of the error would be



legally regarded only as the perpetrator of an accidental death. Has anybody anything to say?"

No one spoke immediately. Finally Mitchell said slowly, "I'm sorry a thing like that had to happen."

Nelse stood up. "I'm more used to this sort of business than you," he said to the Captain. For ten minutes he asked questions of the servants. Who was Stacey? How long had they known him? Where had he guided before? Did anyone have a grudge against him? But the lawyer's findings were meagre. The other guides didn't know Stacey. They were all new. He seemed "like a nice fellow."

When the lawyer had finished he turned to Bailey. "All right, Rob. I suppose we ought to go over the place where the man was found."

Bailey agreed. "You and I will do that." To the guests he said, "Everybody go ahead with your plans for the day. We'll bury Stacey tomorrow afternoon. If any of you want to be there, we'll be glad of it. But I don't ask it. Come on, Nelse."

He left the house with his friend. They started toward the woods.

Nelse said presently. "You, of course, have already gone over the ground. Find anything?"

Bailey grinned without mirth. "That was a lie, Nelse—the whole damn thing. Stacey was sleeping in my bed. I was spending the evening out in the open. He was supposed to watch for an attack—on me. He went to sleep. Someone killed him in my bed, thinking it was me."

Nelse walked in silence for a while. "Mitchell?" he asked.

"Didn't budge all night. Asleep in bed."

"Who knows the truth?"

"Rogers, the two guides, the engineer. Nobody else. Except, of course, the killer."

"Then you're getting warm. Your murder party wasn't so loony. At least, you've got the right man among your guests."

"Or woman. Look, Nelse. I told that yarn because I hope it'll worry the murderer. Make him think that we know a lot more than we do. Make him nervous."

"Cat and mouse?"

"What else can I do? Tell them the truth? Tell ten people that one of them is trying to kill their host? What would that gain? Nothing. It would keep them in a panic up here for two weeks. It would stop the murderer cold. We'd never get another crack at whoever it is. I'd be right back where I was when we started."

Nelse said reproachfully,

"It's pretty tough on the guide. Bumped off like that—"

"Sure." The Captain's voice was fierce. "Tough! I hate to lose a man. I hate worse to lose a man who was substituting for me. You ought to know—"

"I'm sorry, Rob—"

"That's all right. The thing's getting me down. After all, the guy was a dick. He had his job to do, but he fell asleep at his post. If he'd been awake when someone crept across that roof, he might have saved his life."

"Don't take that attitude!"

Bailey's eyes met the lawyer's. "I've been scared before—often—but never this bad."

"What are you going to do from now on—about sleeping, I mean?"

"Haven't decided. Can't stay awake constantly for two weeks."

"Want me to take over at Stacey's post?"

Bailey grinned. "No. Thanks. Look, we'll go back to the house—I want a squint at the women's shoes."

He told Dudley why.

In Bernetta Smith's closet they found a pair of high-heeled shoes with damp soles. As near as both men could remember, she had not worn them the previous day. They took the shoes outdoors. They passed within plain sight of the lake shore where Bernetta and Ralph

were sitting on a rock. They'd given up the idea of archery.

The shoes fitted exactly the tracks in the woods.

So it was Bernetta Smith who had found his hiding place and stood over him as he slept. And Bernetta Smith admitted she had once been on an archery team. And Bernetta Smith had been in his office the day strychnine had been put into his dessert.

"I think," the Captain said coolly to Dudley, "that Bernetta is going to get the next chance at me."

Something easy, the Captain thought. Something so simple that she can't fail to take it.

When Evelyn Case learned that her fiancé had taken the red-headed actress up on Knob Hill to watch the sunset she was furious. She said so to everyone who would listen. Then Carey MacGregor came in from a day of hunting. They'd missed a moose, but they had a big bag of ruffed grouse. Carey was harangued by the incensed debutante. Her wrath and the tears accompanying it had a strange effect on him. He broke his customary reticence to say, "Rob is a heel. Come on, I'll take you canoeing."

She went with him, spitefully.

At the same time Bailey and Bernetta were scrambling

toward the top of the mountain. They flushed deer and grouse. They walked for a while through the tangled birches and raspberry bushes that had partially healed an old burn. Then they reached hardwoods which gave way to white pines. The country was now open, carpeted, shady, cool, and sweet-smelling. It seemed empty of game. Thick boles shot up to unbelievable heights and flowered inadequately in a few dark-furred boughs—plumes against a blue sky. The slope grew steeper. They used their hands to help themselves from time to time, and they often stopped to rest.

But Bailey did not talk much until they were on the bare summit. For several minutes they looked down at the dollhouse camp and at the lake, the submarine borders of which were discernible — shoals, sandbars, and indigo deeps. Then they crossed the summit to its western side. From there nothing could be seen but the vacant Canadian wilderness. Knob Hill, at that point, dropped away for five hundred feet as a sheer cliff. The sun was still well above the remote, sharp horizon of trees. Bailey said that the lakes at their feet were nameless.

They sat down.

Bernetta changed the subject

from geography to persons. "You happy with Evelyn?"

"Why?"

"I can't imagine it. She's not your sort of female. Cold, calculating, and you can see she doesn't love you."

He allowed the discussion to continue on her terms, which was not like him. "She's just—overbred."

"The devil she is! The only man she'd please would be one who'd marry her as an ornament. Worship her. Enjoy her persecution. Robbie, whatever happened between you and me?"

"Let's not go into it."

"I insist."

"I just—don't love you."

She nodded painfully. "I suppose you know that you are everything in my life?"

He laughed annoyingly. "You're just stoking a dead fire. You'd forget me in a minute if somebody with the same bankroll came along."

"Don't be nasty!"

"Listen, Bernetta. You've been tagging me for years. Do you know why I brought you to Lonely Lodge? Why I asked you to see the sunset? It's because I wanted to tell you to quit. To stop pestering me. Forget me!"

That brought forth her rage, as he had intended. Her green eyes widened. She shook.

"There are times," she said, "when I'd love to kill you for what you've done to me."

"It's a mutual feeling. You're kidding yourself about me, making a fool of yourself. And if you haven't any self-respect you might at least consider my feelings in the matter. Nothing is more irritating than—"

She slapped him. And she didn't retreat afterward. "I never heard you talk like that before," she said vehemently. "I won't stand for it! Oh, God, if I were only a man!" She hit him again.

Bailey rose. He did it slowly, in the manner of a weary man, a man who has been pushed too far by a woman.

He walked to the edge of the cliff and faced the sun in apparent anger and resentment. He slipped, sat down. Earth slid. He grabbed a bush and rolled over, his feet dangling. Little by little his body slid farther over the brink. He clung to the bush with one hand. "Hey!" he yelled sharply.

Bernetta had been absorbed in her fury. His yell brought her to her feet. She ran toward him. She looked—and screamed.

He was dangling on the face of the cliff. A single stunted shrub clutched in his right hand prevented him from a five-hundred-foot fall—so far, at

least, as she could see. She didn't know that Bailey had prepared for that "fall" carefully—that, gripped in his other hand, was a rope which ran in a crack, beneath moss, over the top of the precipice to a tree. Bailey could have scrambled back in a second. But his situation was so seemingly perilous, his grip on the bush so apparently uncertain, and the abyss below him so deep, that there appeared to be no doubt of the reality of the accident.

After she had screamed, Bernetta knelt and grabbed his arm. She pulled, but he was too heavy. He looked at her terror-stricken countenance. His own face was calm. "If you hate me so," he said evenly, "why don't you yank the bush out?"

Her only reaction was to tug harder and gasp, "God give me strength!"

"I'd fall," he went on, "and nobody would be any the wiser."

She started stripping off her sweater. He let the bush slip through his fingers another inch. "You'd just have to kick out the bush. Or just wait."

Frantically she tied one arm of her sweater around his neck. The other end she hitched to the base of a larger bush. "Can't you use it for a rope?" she gasped.

"I'll try." He tested the sweater. He came up on it hand over hand. Bernetta tottered, close to collapse. He moved her away from the edge, gently. They started down the mountain. He consoled her. And he thought: if Bernetta Smith had tried three times to kill him, why had she refused to avail herself of a perfect opportunity? Her fright had seemed real, her efforts to save him desperate and resourceful. He was now sure that Bernetta Smith was innocent.

He regretted his deliberate attack on her and tried to apologize for it.

To his surprise and relief the woman responded to his stumbling explanation by saying, "You know, Rob, you were really right. Going through a thing like that makes me realize it. But I don't want you to be angry at me all your life. Let's be friends."

"I'd like to."

"When this vacation—and you don't mind if I say it's a pretty harrowing one?—is ended I'm going back to work. I came to see you one day in your office. I was low and broke. You weren't in—they said."

"Yeah. I heard about it."

Bernetta took his arm. They were walking now under the tall pines. The sun had set although they had not waited for its

flaming descent. "I was going to ask you to lend me some money. When I heard you were out I said I'd wait, and your secretary went to lunch. The reason I said I'd wait was purely feminine. I'd seen Mary Brookhart in a car parked on the Fifth Avenue side of your building. I wanted to know if you and Mary were going places again. She was reading a book and looked as if she was there for a long wait."

"Not for me," Bailey replied casually. "I've only run into Mary two or three times this fall. And I never went anywhere with her. She must have been waiting for somebody else."

"Maybe," Bernetta answered. "But when I gave up sitting it out for you and went into the elevator, she got out on your floor and started toward your office. She never noticed me."

Bailey regarded the ground ahead. "Did she? I didn't get any message. I did hear that you'd been in, though. Good thing you decided not to wait. I sat in that damn conference till three. My lunch was cold, and I was half shot when it was ended."

"Your lunch came up while I sat there. I took a peek at it. Almost sneaked it. You see, I was pretty darn broke. And hungry. Next day, though, I got two weeks' work."

"Has it really been that tough?"

"That tough."

"Look, Bernetta. I said I didn't love you. I don't. I was damn rough with you. But I'd like to be your friend. And when we get back to town I'll put in a word for you with certain people I know."

"That's all I need."

Bailey stared at her a moment, tripped, and grinned. "I'm glad that I did fall over that cliff!"

"Me, too—now. But I was scared sick."

They sat around the dinner table. A morbid group. The death of the guide had reduced them to long silences. There were other undertones. Their host and the actress had come back chattily to the Lodge. He had exacted from Bernetta a promise to say nothing about his narrow escape: "Only upset everyone more than they are."

But when Bailey and Bernetta returned, Carey and Evelyn were still out on the lake. They stayed there until darkness fell and then paddled home in high spirits which, by contrast, only emphasized the general gloom. Evelyn tried to make Bailey feel acutely jealous.

"You don't mind even a teeny bit, Robbie?" she said for the second time.

He sipped Chablis. "To mind would be an expression of bad faith, wouldn't it?"

"Carey is such an *adorable* companion!"

The Captain wouldn't be taunted. He winked at his partner. "I ought to know. Carey and I have spent a lot of time together doing funny things in funny places."

MacGregor, however, did not reflect that pleasant spirit. He flushed and stared at his plate.

Mitchell began to discuss the day's bag of grouse. "They're so damn tame here! They fly into a tree, a whole covey of them, and you can shoot them from the bottom up. If you shoot the highest bird first, he'll fall and scare away the others. If you shoot the bottom one, they'll just stand there."

"That," Bailey said, "is because their natural enemy is the fox. They feel safe when they're a few feet off the ground."

"I'm going out tomorrow," Mary Brookhart announced, "and I'll bet I get the first moose. That is, if Robbie doesn't paddle me."

No one was especially amused. Mr. Walters looked at her. "You're fond of hunting?"

"Of course. I've spent a great deal of time hunting—everywhere. Lions, rhino, tigers—with Albert in India—that's

where I met Robbie, though I saw more of him in Bolivia. You'd be surprised what a reputation our Robbie has in some heathen lands! I've seen a Sikh turn as pale as snow at the mention of his name."

Walters still regarded her, his deep-set eyes thoughtful. He was a gaunt man with shaggy hair. He looked more like a professor of some esoteric subject than the general manager of a complex corporation. "Some women," he continued, "seem to have more of an instinct for hunting than most men. If the female is the more deadly, it would seem that our biological concept of man is mistaken."

"Killing," the woman answered, "is defensive with men. The first person to think of it as an offensive measure was undoubtedly a woman. And women continue to be the force behind offense. Take our Robbie. I imagine he's killed plenty of people. But there was never any woman in his life—especially—so his killings were always defensive. In philosophy, at least. Weren't they, Robbie?"

"Always, my dear. I always gave my enemies the first shot—free."

Mitchell snorted. Dudley laughed at him. It had occurred to Dudley that Mitchell disliked

the Captain principally because he envied him. Mitchell's instincts were predatory enough, but his acts were always financial. He envied every man of action and every compliment paid to physical prowess.

Walters said placidly to Mrs. Brookhart, "Did you ever kill anyone?"

His wife murmured, "Logan!"

There was a constrained silence at the table. The mysterious manner in which her two husbands had met their death made such a question either ignorant, or intolerably rude. Mrs. Walters knew that her husband's question was framed in a mistaken facetiousness. He never listened to gossip. But no one else could be sure.

Mary Brookhart regarded him amiably and dynamited the tension with a reply that was either hysterically misguided, or utterly brazen, or a foolish attempt at humor. She said, "Why, of course! Haven't you heard? I killed *both* my husbands. And I tried once to kill Robbie. Then there have been any number of lesser murders—let me see—"

When she glanced at the fixed faces and was immediately caught up in a half dozen separate, loud, conversational efforts to change the subject, she shrugged and said to Mr.



Walters, who was astonished at the riot he had caused, "I'll tell you about it some time. After all, it really isn't a nice thing to be talking about."

Bailey walked into the living room after dinner and saw to it that Rogers supplied the wants of his guests. Evelyn, still playing on her sudden attachment for Carey, inveigled him into bridge with Bernetta and Mitchell. Mary Brookhart, Nelson Dudley, Ralph, and Mr. Walters made up another table. Evelyn's father "kibitzed" at both tables. Mrs. Walters, who had refused all invitations to play, waited for a chance to speak to the Captain.

"I'm not young or pretty," she said to him in simulated airiness, "but I'd like to talk to you."

He nodded and cheerily invited her to look at the stars. She sent for a coat and together they went outdoors.

From the first time he had met Mrs. Walters he had liked her. She was childless, and yet she reminded him more of a mother than any woman he knew. He had struck up a friendship with the wife of his general manager on which he had often relied in hours of stress. He would drop in at their apartment without phoning. He would sit and talk to her for hours, often about financial in-

tricacies which she did not pretend to understand. He had once explained his feeling about her to Nelson Dudley by saying, "She doesn't exactly bake cookies for me, but she gives me the same comfortable feeling." And it was on her account that he had saved her husband from disgrace.

So when she asked to talk with him he had experienced a sudden relief. While they strolled and discussed nothing, he could straighten out such tangles in his mind as his belief in Bernetta's warm humanity, and, alternately, his suspicion that she was diabolically clever. That suspicion, in fact, had gnawed at him all through dinner. Maybe she had known his fall was faked. Maybe she had said Mary Brookhart was in his building just to divert his attention. Maybe—

Gaily he took Martha Walters' reassuring arm and led her down to the pier. He pointed out Cassiopeia, the dippers, and the Polar Star. They looked at the lake, a rough oval about five miles long, shadowed by Knob Hill, and indented by sand-edged, tree-walled bays, and he told her how he had found this particular stretch of country many years before when for a brief time he had been a professional pilot. "I'd lost my course. Fog. It opened up—and

there I was right over this spot. I came down and sat on this lake for two days. It suited me. Hills—you couldn't call them mountains—water everywhere—lakes—rapids—and game! I practically had to beat off the moose with a stick. I made up my mind then and there that if I ever had enough dough I'd buy this territory and make it all Baileytown. So I did. I've just changed the name of the lake, by the way, to Lake Martha." He chuckled.

The woman laughed. "What was it called before?"

"Captain Bailey's Private Ocean."

"Rob?" Her tone was no longer amused. The seriousness with which she said that solitary word startled him.

"Yes?"

"I'm going to ask you a question."

He tried to be bantering again. "You know I haven't any secrets from you, Martha. Tell you anything! I still think Evelyn's sweet and I'm going to marry her. I didn't kiss Bernetta in the woods this afternoon, you suspicious old woman—and I like her but she's got an unreliable disposition. I—"

"You won't like the one I am going to ask."

He sat her down on a bench and stood in front of her. "All right," he said quietly, "shoot."

"Did my husband kill that guide last night—thinking it was you?"

He took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, tossed it, and caught one before it fell out. He offered it to her. They smoked. "I don't know, Martha," he replied at last. "Go on."

"You didn't fool me this morning. I knew you were lying. I knew there was something wrong up here the minute we landed. My reasons? You were too debonair. And then too grave and sincere today when you explained the guide's 'accident.' And you're instinctively much too tactful to get together a group of people you are hurting—just to see how they would take their medicine."

"Well?"

"I don't know what you did to my husband three years ago, but since that time something has happened. He had always been loud in your praise. But lately he's been having terrible nightmares about you—so bad that going to the office to work where you are every day has been a strain to him. Last night he couldn't sleep at all. I caught him two or three times, fully dressed, going out for a prowlor coming back in. He's brilliant, Rob. You know that. But for a mature man, terribly unstable, imaginative, secretive,

strange. Besides, he's thoroughly familiar with archery—belongs to a club in Westchester."

"I see," Bailey said gloomily.

"Did he do it?"

"I don't know."

"That's what I thought."

The woman was overwhelmingly sympathetic. Her own fear seemed less difficult for her to bear than her worry about him. "You don't have to tell me a word, Rob. I know you're frightened sick. I've guessed that someone has been attacking you and you brought us all up here to try to find out who that person was. You don't even have to tell me if I'm right. But it's so like you—so brave personally, and yet so impractical and dangerous. If I can help—"

He put his arm around her ample shoulders. "You're a swell gal, Martha. Let me ask you a question. Do you think anybody else has guessed what I'm up to?"

"No, Rob. Men don't make guesses like that. And Evelyn and Mary and Bernetta are all too vain to look into things deeply enough."

"Thanks."

She squeezed his hand. "Please—*please* be careful!" After a moment she added, "I'll try to keep tabs on my husband."

"Rather you didn't."

She shook with apprehension, but she said nothing more.

That night Bailey felt sleep would be impossible—at least, when his guests began to say their "good nights," he was far from feeling a desire to go to bed. Evelyn didn't kiss him, almost snubbed him. Her father and Mr. Walters got him talking about his weapons and curios. That brought the weapons' somewhat rusted condition to his irritated attention and he used it as a pretext for staying up. Like a crochety colonel he fumed about the servants he kept and the poor attention they paid to his collection.

Ralph, Mitchell, Nelson, and Carey played one rubber after twelve o'clock. The women had all retired by that time. When the men eventually went upstairs, they left Bailey sitting before the fire, a basketful of swords, cutlasses, daggers, and dueling pistols beside his chair, a newspaper on his lap, and, on the table at his elbow, bottles of oil, a heap of clean rags, and a whetstone. He liked to fool with such things. It occupied his hands while his mind was left free. And the objects themselves were a natural part of his hazardous, adventuresome background.

When he was alone with them he fell to thinking. Agitations assailed him, and doubts

Mitchell had apparently intended to shoot him. But Mitchell hadn't killed the guide. But maybe Mitchell had bribed some of his servants. Bailey dismissed that idea finally as improbable.

Ralph had been given an apparently excellent opportunity to kill him—and Ralph had made no move. Still you couldn't be sure that the murderer would grab the single chance you provided. That opportunity might not suit his—or her—particular temperament. Bernetta, for instance, had pulled him off the cliff, but possibly because death in that manner seemed too horrible to her. Or possibly because she had seen the rope. Maybe his whole concept of how to discover his enemy was foolish. It was, however, the only idea he had.

He squinted through the barrel of a pistol, and rubbed it bright, and began to plan other death traps for himself—other simple opportunities for potential murderers—opportunities, however, for which he could have a reliable antidote prepared in advance.

It was, he thought, a bit grim to be one's own *agent provocateur*. Sherlock Holmes had done it occasionally. He put the pistol aside. He picked up the Whetstone . . .

A long time afterward he heard somebody walking softly down the hall. Not footsteps, but intermittent creakings that dissociated themselves from nocturnal house sounds. Everybody, including the servants, was presumably in bed. Yet the top stair creaked.

Bailey let the dagger he was sharpening drop into his lap. He relaxed his hands, closed his eyes. A single lamp focused a cone of light on him and the fire flickered on his face. He began to breathe evenly and slowly.

Inch by inch Mary Brookhart came down the stairs. He watched from beneath one eyelid and saw that she was carrying no gun in her hand. She crept into the center of the room. Then, in a very low voice, she said, "Hello, Robbie. Want company? I couldn't sleep."

When he did not reply she walked around him and looked at him for a long while. He allowed himself to keep track only of her hands, for fear she might see light glint on his pupils. When she was sure he was asleep she made a silent tour of the room. She looked into the dining room and out the windows. She glanced behind a tall screen. Afterward she made a slow circuit of his trophies. They seemed to fas-

minate her—the heads less than the weapons. The attention she bestowed on a blowgun, a scimitar, and a Malay kris was chilling; but he continued to feign sleep.

Finally, smiling enigmatically, she came toward him again. Very gently she lifted the dagger from his lap. She felt its edge and its point. She turned with it toward the fire and allowed its light to play on the long blade.

She was hefting it, calculatingly.

Then she turned toward him again . . .

Bailey was ready. Through his lashes he watched, not the silhouette of the ivory-skinned woman, faintly showing through a red negligee, not her flashing black eyes or her fine black hair, but the glitter in her hand. When it rose he would still be motionless. When it descended he would intercept it with a leap like that of a sprung trap.

But it didn't descend. Mary Brookhart quietly replaced the dagger on his lap and sat down on a bench beside the fire, waiting, as if she expected that her psychic presence, or the scent of her alluring perfume, would finally rouse him.

So he stirred, opened his eyes, saw her, and said, "Hello, Mary."

"Hello, Robbie. I 'couldn't sleep. You looked so peaceful. I was amusing myself with your trinkets. You know, if this house weren't new, I'd swear it was haunted. I don't know why either. But I get the jitters the moment the lights go out."

Bailey had no intention of conducting a conversation with Mary Brookhart. The fact that she had not stabbed him had left him numb. And he was not interested in her insomnia, whether it was caused by jitters or a desire to see him alone. He looked at his watch and exclaimed, "Good Lord, two fifteen! I've got to turn in!"

She regarded him ruefully. "You're a dreadfully disappointing host."

He laughed. "You go back to bed. Read a book. Flock of them over there. I'm going to be very rude and scam."

He went to his room, calling Rogers on the way. Rogers took his place in bed.

"Don't *you* fall asleep!" he cautioned the detective. "And change off with someone tomorrow. Otherwise you'll be all in."

Rogers' pale eyes showed something like amusement. "Do you think I'm *likely* to sleep, sir?"

Bailey went out the window and across the porch. He found his sleeping bag. He carried it a

considerable distance from the house, circled, and spread it on a bed of faded and dried sphagnum, within sight of the yellow rectangles of several windows. Over him and around him were tall ferns. He lay down, and suddenly realized he was exhausted.

His awakening was like that of the previous day. He became instantly conscious, and with a presentiment of being watched. Again the light was gray. Again he feigned sleep and looked carefully up.

This time he saw the woman standing over him.

He had a brief glimpse of her, and then she ran.

Bailey was on his feet, his automatic in his hand, and in pursuit of her in less than a second. He overtook her rapidly and, still without knowing who it was, grabbed her.

She didn't struggle.

Caught in powerful arms, in the dusk of dawn, under the trees, she made no resistance at all. "Please!" That word only she spoke.

Bailey let go of her.

It was Mrs. Walters' maid, Beth.

Dumbfounded, his thoughts disordered, and stirred as he had been when he had seen her before, he muttered, "What the devil—"

She looked like a frightened

deer. Her eyes were wide, her hands crossed on her heaving chest. Not beautiful in such distress, perhaps, but striking and extraordinary.

"I wouldn't have awakened you—for my life—" she gasped.

"You were looking at me yesterday."

"I've loved you ever since I was six years old."

"Good God!" Bailey gazed feverishly at the trees, to be sure they were trees.

The girl stood in front of him. "There! It's said! Good! You don't know me. You won't remember me. You taught me to ride. At the Army Post in Texas. Me and a lot of other kids."

He was scowling at her. "How—?" he began, and then started over, evidently feeling that "What—?" would make a more suitable beginning.

She stopped being afraid. "I guess you're more scared than I am. I'll try to explain fast—so we both won't go crazy. My name's Beth Conrad. My father and I lived in Texas when I was little. We were rich then. You taught a kid's riding class. I adored you. I kept track of you through the newspapers till I was seventeen. Then I almost forgot—until one day you came into the Walters' house. That's why I stayed on."

"Oh," he said absurdly.

"You see, father died. I lost all his money, so I had to work. I didn't know anything but how to be rich. But I did know what my maids knew. When I started to eat on breadlines I decided to become a maid. I went to an agency and Mrs. Walters hired me. I hated it. The other servants were horrid. Then one night you called. I saw you from upstairs—so I stayed on. See?"

From that outpouring Bailey made only faint sense. He tucked his automatic in its holster. His brain turned back twenty years and placed, in a forgotten group of kids who had helped him while away a number of empty afternoons, the face of Beth Conrad—snub-nosed, then, and under a boy's haircut. His expression became whimsical. "I see," he said. "You had a crush on me when you were little. Then I happened to turn up again in your life, so you—"

The light was getting better. He was able to see the flush on her face and the expression in her eyes. An expression that still disturbed him—although now he could account for the original sense of strangeness that Beth Conrad had given him. It was a remote, subconscious recognition—or, rather, an appeal to memory. She was nodding soberly, "So I stayed

on where I was and learned about you. Martha—Mrs. Walters—likes to talk about you."

"Martha," he answered dryly, "evidently knows all about you—since you call her by her first name."

"Privately," Beth replied. "I'm her maid—companion, if you like. She told me that you were in trouble here."

"She didn't tell me she'd told you," he said bluntly.

"No. She wouldn't. But the night before last I was looking out the hall window when you went over the roof. I was on my way to bed, wearing mules. I borrowed a pair of shoes that were in front of a door to be cleaned and I followed you."

"Good heavens!" A startling thought occurred to Bailey. "You didn't sit there all night?"

"Stood."

He gulped. "Were you armed?"

She shook her head. "No. But I could have yelled."

"And you stood guard all tonight, too?"

"Not quite all night. I had a terrible time finding you."

"Don't you ever sleep?"

"In the afternoons. Mrs. Walters gives me plenty of time."

He saw more light. "Oh. She *knows* about your habit of taking the dogwatch."



"Of course. I told her as soon as I got back yesterday morning."

Bailey scratched his head. "Damn," he said in a perplexed tone. "You understand, Beth, that it's now time for me to do my morning porch-climbing? And I can't escort you back to the house. Being a man engaged to be married—"

She laughed. "Good night, then."

"But from now on, if you don't mind, I'd rather have privacy out here. You see, never having been guarded by a woman before—"

Her laughter was louder and she broke it off only when he glanced warily in the direction of the house.

He started away from her, then turned back. "I presume Martha has told you exactly *what* prompts me to hide in the bush?"

"Oh, yes."

"Wouldn't you like this revolver, then—because I'm going to desert you here and now. And there may be boogiemen in the woods—"

She surprised him. She said, "Thanks," and took it.

Bailey went up into the pine tree and over the roof. He sent Rogers away to get some sleep. He lay down in his own bed and stared at the ceiling—a thoroughly unnerved man. Was the

girl crazy? Fantastic, childish, emotional, lovely, yet strong and real. Was she devoted to him because of a childhood crush? Or had she built up on that memory a false and day-dreaming structure when he had reappeared in her adult life? Or was Martha—he hopped out of bed.

That was it! Just like Martha! She'd found the girl, hired her, learned her story, discovered that she knew him, and deliberately brought her to Lonely Lodge. As an antidote for Evelyn? He knew Martha didn't like his fiancée. Or for the girl's sake? After all, Martha was sentimental—but less a fool than most men he knew. And pacing the floor in his socks he was alternately annoyed and inexplicably pleased: if Martha liked and trusted anyone so deeply, that person was bound to be basically sound. Bailey wanted Beth to be basically sound. He didn't know why.

He knew only, in the following three days, that it was impossible for him to get Beth off his mind.

Three days.

He saw her seldom. But even on the rare and brief occasions when he did, Evelyn noticed enough to remark on it. "Pretty, isn't she? I never knew you had a taste in servant girls. She's the elfin type—but a little

too buxom, don't you think?"

Catty. Evelyn was trying to make him uncomfortable. Furthermore, she was devoting so much time to Carey that everyone began to wonder if she were not either overdoing her revenge or changing her interest from Bailey to his partner.

Three days.

The Captain had little enough time in which to think consciously about Beth or even his fiancée.

Little enough time to think about the entertainment of guests.

He was, he believed, losing his reason.

Things were happening at Lonely Lodge in those three days—little things—which had no relation to any purpose he could imagine. Mysterious things. Things suggestive of a possibility that kept him awake all night, alert all day, watching, hunting, listening.

On the morning of the first day, the day on which he had caught Beth guarding him in the dawn, no untoward event had occurred. Indeed, his guests seemed to be relieved by the fact that the night had brought forth nothing new. They played tennis in the morning. Mitchell got his moose, not fifty yards from where Bailey had dumped him into the river. Carey and Evelyn, out for a walk, caught a

young beaver and brought it to camp. They spent hours making a pen for it. The chef brought in a quarter of the moose before lunch. The guides had its skin and head salted down. Ralph, trolling alone, had landed a really gigantic pike. He came in, flushed and excited, and told and retold his story of the fight put up by the fish.

That vacation aspect relieved a certain frustration.

Over the pine-topped luncheon table the guests solemnly decided to attend the guide's funeral. It was there that Bailey's new fear had formed its first root.

Everyone was present. They had made a grave under an oak tree in the nearby woods. They walked to it—guides, servants, guests. Nelson Dudley read a service. The women dropped wild flowers on the plain board coffin. They felt respect—not the sadness of losing an intimate friend. Sun stippled the tranquil spot. Nelse stood on a carpet of ground pine. "Ashes to ashes," he read impressively. It was the best rite they could manage for an almost anonymous man's burial.

Then it happened.

Bailey heard it, felt it with his body, though it was trifling.

"Ashes to ashes," Nelse had said.

Nelse's voice faltered. He'd

heard it, too. Rogers and the guides instinctively lifted their lowered heads. The service went on.

Bailey didn't hear the rest of the service. A shot. Who was out there in the wilderness? Who? He looked over the gathered company incredulously. Nobody was missing.

He strained his ears for another distant report. But there was none. Someone had probably brought down a deer or a duck.

It didn't mean anything. In fact, Bailey told himself, anyone traveling into his corner of the wilderness would be told all about Lonely Lodge—would, in fact, make a point of visiting him. His hospitality was famous. People who had already journeyed the four hundred miles between the Lodge and the next nearest house wouldn't overlook it. He predicted that in three hours—an estimation made rapidly—strangers or acquaintances would paddle up to his dock. With, no doubt, a deer as an offering of friendship. Nobody, he insisted, ever comes within a hundred miles of here without looking in. But, somehow, he felt sure that the author of that distant shot would not show up.

That evening, at sundown, Nelse found him on the dock.

Bailey was considering taking a canoe out to investigate for himself.

"You heard it," Nelse said.

"Yeah. Somebody coming through. Probably they had made camp for the day and were rustling up a little meat."

Nelse nodded. "Sure. They'll be in tomorrow. The guides heard it, too. Want to send one of them down the line?"

Bailey shook his head. "Hell, no. We'll wait. I'm just jumpy."

"You're shot to pieces. Look, Rob, no kidding. How about posting your old pal for at least one night? I'll bet you haven't slept a wink since—"

The Captain shook his head. He didn't deny that he hadn't slept. He had. But he was anticipating nights of vigilance ahead.

Nothing more happened that day.

The next day there was a new incident. Bailey hadn't slept—but not because he was afraid. He had waited in the woods all night for Beth to appear. Waited and listened, hoping that she would be there and wondering why he hoped. He had rolled over a thousand times with the thought that it was ridiculous to be so interested in a situation which was merely naive and unconventional. But that had not made him sleep.

At breakfast his moroseness

was noticed by everybody.

People went hunting. Ralph went fishing again. And Evelyn, apparently in apology for her defection, persuaded him to go swimming with her. It was another cloudless day, hot at noon, and though the water was cold, his swim refreshed him. He spent the whole forenoon lying on the dock, diving occasionally, and talking to Evelyn, and to Mrs. Walters, who came down with her knitting.

If she had been told by Beth about Beth's escapade on the preceding day—which she almost certainly had—she gave no hint of it.

Just before time to dress for lunch they sighted Ralph's canoe coming rapidly from the far end of the lake.

"I'll bet," Mrs. Walters said, "he's caught another fish."

Logically the Captain should have agreed with her. But when he stood up to view the jerky progress of the canoe, he was filled with anxiety. He hailed Ralph when he was still far off.

"What's up?"

Ralph yelled, his voice alarmed, "Somebody's been camping up on the lake!"

He was closer to shore. Bailey called back, "Yeah! I heard somebody shooting out in the bush yesterday."

Ralph ran the canoe up and Bailey helped him out.

"Who is it?" Ralph asked.

"Don't know. What did you find?"

"You know that big rock promontory down by the inlet? On the left side, going toward it?"

"To the west? Sure."

"Well, I was trolling there—that's where I snagged that pike yesterday. And I noticed a fire—smoke, rather. I landed. Somebody had built a fireplace out of two flat stones and stoked it with those dry sticks that haven't any bark, the kind you find on ledges."

"Is that all?"

"Sure. Except that there were some crumbs of their lunch around."

"What did they have for lunch?"

"I don't know. Yes, I do—rice and raisins."

"Did you holler?"

"Hell, no!"

"Why not?"

Ralph hesitated. "Well," he said at last, "the spot was so far away, and I didn't know what kind of guys they might be, and I was alone—without a gun—and I couldn't imagine why they hadn't dropped in here when they were so near—unless they were the sort of people who don't want to be seen. I got to thinking about escaped convicts and stuff like that—and that rock ledge got lonesomer and

lonesomer—so pretty soon I came home.”

“I think I’ll take a look.”

He saw fear in Martha Walters’ face.

Evelyn said, “What nonsense! You’d think you were a Royal Mounted policeman!”

He replied somberly, “I don’t like people I don’t know who avoid me. Not up here.”

His fiancée pouted. “Just when you were beginning to act like a human being again, you have to tear away and play detective. I warn you, if you’re not back by three o’clock I’m going to flirt with Carey again.”

“He’s harmless.”

“Is he! What about me?”

The Captain stepped into Ralph’s canoe and paddled strongly toward the north end of the lake.

Martha glanced disparagingly at Ralph. “Your cousin doesn’t seem to mind the idea of escaped convicts!”

“No,” the young man answered. “Why should he? He’s got an automatic under his arm.”

On the rock ledge Bailey found exactly what Ralph had described—a small competent fireplace, the embers of a fire, a crust of rice and raisins drying in the sun, and a mark, under water, where a canoe had been pulled up. No tracks. He hallooed for a few minutes.

There was no response. So he got into his canoe and pushed up the inlet. In the next three hours he crossed Rainy Pond, Duck Lake, two miles of Ossawasset River, and gave up only where that waterway narrowed down, speeded up, and leaped over the Upper Ossawasset Falls. His eyes had surveyed every inch of shoreline along the way. If that country had been trespassed, the trespassers had certainly covered their trail. He could discern no other spot where a canoe had been landed. And after searching both sides of the high and thundering falls, he was certain that nobody had portaged around them all summer.

Consequently he was left with one answer: whoever had lunched on the lake shore was either hiding around the lake or somewhere between it and the falls. It wasn’t reasonable to assume that they—or he—would have elected to make a long carry through the woods. A fugitive? Maybe. And though fugitives from justice are generally regarded with alarm, the Captain earnestly hoped that the mysterious visitor would prove to be in that category.

As he climbed back up the banks beside the falls he had another thought. He stood on the edge of the swift water for a long time and cogitated. At last

he seemed satisfied, and started home. It was late afternoon when he reached Lonely Lodge.

In the evening he saw Beth. He had gone to his room to dress when he heard Bernetta's voice raised in feline frenzy. He hurried down the hall and found her bawling out Mrs. Walters' "maid." The actress saw him. "I asked her to iron this chemise!" she said stridently. "Look at it—burned! The clumsy idiot! And she had the nerve to tell me I had no right to order her to iron it in the first place! I didn't order her!"

Ordinarily such wrath over a trifle would have amused the Captain. Or perhaps annoyed him. But now he regarded Bernetta's indignation as totally unwarranted. He recalled that it was precisely that quality of her temperament which had made him mistrust her originally, and he felt that Beth was the victim of unreasonable persecution. He said, curbing himself, "Shut up, Bernetta! Beth isn't supposed to do your ironing—"

"Look, it's ruined!"

"All right. I'll pay for it. But for heaven's sake shut up. Come on, Beth."

He slammed Bernetta's door and stalked down the hall, Beth following him. When he faced her she was laughing. "Maids," she said, "lead interesting lives. Now that girl is hysterical and

uncivil. I told her so. I knew she'd blow up."

He stared at her. The door to the sitting room of the suite occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Walters was open. She walked in and he followed her. He still did not know why. The attraction she had for him gave him an emotion that was not unlike rage. She was too perfect, too assured. And she returned his violent gaze so comprehendingly that he felt his common sense depart. "You weren't on duty last night," he said finally.

"No," she answered. "You told me not to be."

"I sat up all night waiting for you."

Her eyes, he thought. Damn them, they were laughing!

"I knew you would," she said softly.

He marched up to her. "You know what I'd like to do?" He realized it was silly. "Spank you!"

"Wouldn't you rather kiss me?" she asked.

He didn't answer. He yanked her off her feet and kissed her so hard that it was more like a blow than a meeting of lips. He dropped her and sat down suddenly on a chaise longue. He rubbed his face with his hands. His voice was weary, disgusted.

"I don't know what made me do that. You'll have to forgive me. I used to think I

was a tough guy. But sitting up here, waiting for—I don't know what—and with you busting around the bushes— Damn it, scram!”

She moved toward him, slowly pushed her hand over the back of his head, and asked, “Shall I resume the dogwatch?”

He jumped up, his face flushed. “No! Beat it!”

She went.

And he moved his own hand through his own hair, as if he had never performed the gesture before.

His exhaustion, his failure to make any positive headway in the mere elimination of individuals from the list of those who might be trying to kill him, his increasing dread—still repressed—of the nameless campers in the forest, and, finally, the extraordinarily disturbing effect that Beth had on him, led Bailey for one night to abandon his attempt to trap the murderer by posting a guard in his place in his bedroom. After dinner he apologized to his guests for his fatigue, and retired. He undressed in his own room. He had planned to order Rogers to stand guard over him while he slept, but when the time came to summon his butler, Bailey's uneasiness was so great and his mistrust of everyone so intense that he neither posted a guard nor put a watch-

er in his place. He simply locked up his room and with the utmost precaution climbed up on the second-story roof.

His bedroom was dangerous. The woods around the house were insecure. But no one had seen his ascent to the roof, and no one would look for him there. He had taken two blankets. He spread them out in a tin-guttered hollow behind a gable. It made a hard bed—a shingled trough—but he felt reasonably secure. He could not be seen from the ground. The hiding place satisfied him enough so that he made the resigned decision that if anyone got him here, he'd have to take it. No single man could face twenty-one people—and the unknown number of strangers in the green limbo of the wilderness—for two weeks without sleep.

He slept heavily from early evening until dawn.

Physically refreshed, but mentally still crushed by a nightmarish feeling, he carried out his intentions of the day before. He invited Walters to go for a paddle with him. They took a shotgun.

“Ducks,” the Captain said.

Most of the ducks had started south.

Walters didn't want to go but Bailey insisted.

That hard-pressed invitation,



made at the breakfast table, was ignored by some of the guests. But it brought open terror into the eyes of Martha Walters. It made Nelse Dudley glance at his friend with an expression of warning.

He paddled north to Rainy Pond, Duck Lake itself, and the Ossawasset River. There were small birds in the hemlocks, white clouds in the sky. A black and white loon flew overhead on its prodigious wings. Bailey pushed rhythmically in the stern. A moose, shoulder deep in the water, stared at them, then climbed cumbersomely ashore to trot into the bush.

Walters, angular, deep-voiced, nervous, said he was glad of an opportunity to talk to the Captain alone. "You must not step aside for your employees," he said. "I'm in no position to ask favors of you, I know. You did me a great favor once. You taught me a lesson I shall never forget. But this scheme of yours will wreck so many people—"

"I don't think so. It may reduce a number of fortunes, yours included. But I'm going ahead with it. As soon as Nelse gets back, the deal will go through. I'm even having a new will drawn up so that it'll happen whether I'm dead or alive."

"Aren't you afraid of reprisals by Mitchell?"

"Why?"

"Don't you think he'll wreck your companies when you step out? Don't you realize that your employees won't be able to run the businesses well?"

"You're one of them," the Captain answered. "How about it?"

"I wouldn't want the responsibility."

Bailey was acrimonious. "Nobody does! Everybody wants me to carry him—or her! Well, I'm not! And that's that. Nice day, isn't it?"

"If you prefer to talk about the weather."

"I do." The Captain eyed the shore. "Ducks pretty scarce, I guess. Notice how the current is speeding up?"

"Yes. Rapids ahead?"

"Falls. Haven't you been hearing them?"

"I thought it was the wind."

"Falls. I almost went over them once. A couple of years ago. We were landing just above them. The man with me—a greenhorn, like yourself—stepped out without holding the canoe bow. I'd already tossed my paddle ashore. In two seconds that current sucked me to the brink. If he hadn't had the presence of mind to toss me a paddle and if I hadn't had the luck to grab it, I'd have gone over."

"Long drop?"

"A hundred feet—onto jagged rocks."

"Bad."

"Look!" Bailey's voice was quick and low. "Too late! See that fallen tree yonder? There was a lynx on it."

He paddled ahead. Had the suggestion been well planted? His survey of the day before had assured him that a canoe pushed from the sandy point on which he intended to land would, indeed, carry its occupants over the falls—if there was no paddle. The water was too deep for wading, too swift for swimming. Would Walters seize the opportunity?

Tied along the bottom, where Bailey could grab it in an instant, was an extra paddle.

The falls roared more loudly. The Ossawasset speeded up so that its shores began to roll past like the background in a motion picture. The shores drew together and in the treacherous current they could see tree limbs and bushes whipped and battered as they were pulled away from their trunks and roots toward the precipice.

A perfect place for murder.

Sweat broke out on the Captain. He felt it trickle on his body. He wiped it out of his eyes. He was close to prayer—prayer that Walters would push him into the tumultuous water and end the days of suspense,

the nights of watching, the strain of creating new and fearsome temptations for men whom he had formerly admired and even loved.

"That little point, over there, is where we'll land."

Walters looked back at him. Walters, too, was pale and sweating. "Isn't that pretty close to the falls?"

"We can make it." Calm words. "Save a lot of carrying. There's another pond below. Apt to be ducks on it."

They were moving very swiftly. An underground boulder made an upshoot of water which bounced and spun them. Bailey dug hard. Ahead of them the river ended in a horizontal line, sleek, smooth, terrifying. Beyond that line of plunge was nothing—except, in the middle distance, the tops of trees where the forest resumed its tenure of the land. Those tree tops glistened with spray. Foam hung in the air, boiling whitely above the level of the brink. The universe now thundered with the din of the waters.

Walters quit paddling and held the gunwales. It seemed for an instant that they would inevitably hurtle over that approaching edge. Then the Captain jammed his paddle again. The canoe skidded diagonally through the torrent. A moment later it slowed and its bow

grated lightly on the shore of the point.

The stern, in which the Captain still sat, was but a few feet from the fingers of the flood. Walters stepped tremblingly ashore. The bow rose. He gripped it. His companion, at whom he looked, tossed his paddle up on the sand. He was smiling cheerfully.

"Fun, eh?"

Bailey put his hand in his breast pocket and took out a pack of cigarettes. Walters was holding the bow in one hand and his shotgun in the other. Bailey lighted his cigarette, paying no attention to his own predicament. A push—and he would be gone, so far as Walters knew. Understandably gone. Nobody but a lunatic would have landed on that point. Everyone at the camp would be glad, in a way, that only one of them had lost his life.

Bailey's match went out. He struck another.

Why doesn't he push me out! he thought furiously.

Walters pulled the canoe as far up on the sand as his strength would permit—so far, in fact, that it tilted on its keel and the Captain very nearly fell into shallow water. The paddle underneath the canoe was yanked loose by being skidded across the bottom. It floated up. Walters saw it first. It spun

once, hit a stump, turned again, and was sucked into the current. They watched it leap over the falls.

Walters stared at the Captain, trembling. Bailey was so thoroughly let down that he did not try to yell any explanation above the din of the falls. He lashed the two paddles they had been using across the thwarts, turned the canoe upside down, knelt beneath it, heaved the paddle blades onto his shoulders, and started painstakingly down the steep portage. Below the falls he put the craft in the water again. They paddled on until it was quiet.

Then Walters stopped. Gravely he turned. His voice was low. "You expected me to shove you out? You baited me to do it—and then had a spare oar in case I did."

"Yeah."

"Funny. You know, for a second I did think of doing it."

"I can't honestly let you think that I expected you to. I merely wondered if you would."

Bailey allowed the current to carry them along. He steered without stroking. Walters took a pipe from his leather jacket and lighted it. His fingers shook. "That—" he said finally—"explains the guide, eh? Mistaken for you. And you're going through us one by one.

And it also explains why we particular people happen to be here."

He was silent for a moment. "You know, Rob, I've been grateful to you for three years. And also afraid of you. My intellect insists that you're a fine man. I certainly will never be fool enough to embezzle again. But some primitive part of me must resent what you know about me. Because I have terrific nightmares about you. In the last six months I've worked myself up so that I've often wondered if I wouldn't crack up into a first-class nervous breakdown any day."

Again he paused and puffed his pipe. "Oddly enough, after this experience, I feel as if I could sleep again, and see you again without that incubus. In fact, I feel ready to take over my share of the corporate burden when you step out. Curious, isn't it? I suppose the very fact that I had my opportunity—and didn't use it—makes me reassured."

"I'm glad," the Captain said. His tone was sincere. This regeneration of Walters almost compensated for the peculiar torture of his disappointment.

"Can I help in any way? If you need guarding—?"

Bailey shook his head. "Nothing. Unless you happen to notice any irregular acts—"

"Right. And thanks again, Rob. This time I think you've managed to make something like a man out of me."

That was that.

When they came back again to Lonely Lodge, the others were gathered in the living room, anxiously discussing new developments in the behavior of the man or men who were living in the forest.

Shortly after Bailey and Walters had paddled away, the whole group had turned out to extinguish a brush fire, the smoke from which had been seen rising in the nearby forest. Fortunately it had not spread far. In the small area it had burned there were signs of human habitation—charred remnants of a spruce-bough bed, tent stakes, a can that had contained solidified alcohol, and an empty rifle shell. The location of the campsite itself, while within three-quarters of a mile of the Lodge, was so well concealed by vegetation that a score of men might have failed to find it in days of search.

In the mind of no one was there any further doubt: Lonely Lodge was being watched by person or persons unknown.

They told Bailey.

"That," Evelyn said, "is how the guide was killed."

Bailey looked from face to

face. "You know what you're implying, of course? Whoever is out in the bush must have burglarized this place to get the bow Why?"

A half dozen reasons were offered.

But Bailey was thinking of what had really happened. A man or men hired to kill him might easily have entered the house at night and stolen the bow and arrow—which was unlike a gun in that it killed soundlessly. To climb the porch and shoot through the window at Stacey afterward was simple. Also simple to return the bow. That last act would have confined suspicion to members of the Lodge community. The real killers would then have returned through the long forest, as they had come.

But they had failed to kill Bailey. So they had not gone away. And the necessity for getting food had made them shoot. The need to cook had forced them to build fires—of twigs on rock ledges—so that no smoke would mark their location. Grim agents. But grim agents of whom? Had an airplane carried them to the north country and dropped them, with their camping equipment, on some not distant lake? Or had they come all the way by water and portage? He didn't know.

"Tomorrow," he said, "we'll have to go out and look for them."

"Why not now?" Evelyn asked.

"Too late. Easy to get lost around here. We'll hunt tomorrow."

She was sitting beside Carey on a window seat.

Bailey wanted to change his clothes. He said so. He contrived to murmur a private word to Martha—a word which changed the complexion of her whole life. All day she had been waiting. With relief, hope, she had seen them return. She had observed the difference in her husband's demeanor. She needed only the Captain's private whisper, "He's okay, Martha," to be made happy.

He put on clean clothes after taking a bath. He felt hollow. He went down to dinner and he needed food, but he could not eat. He shut his mind to the interminable and alarmed speculation about the campers in the woods. Their presence thoroughly upset his original scheme. While he was dressing he had asked Rogers if anyone in the Lodge had behaved in such a way as to suggest that he was communicating with the outsiders. Rogers had shaken his head.

He sipped wine. Evelyn was angry at him. Carey had not

been like his former self. Mr. Case, Evelyn's father, had been morose since his arrival. Maybe he dismissed the notion that Evelyn and her father might be responsible. Dismissed it, however, after it had flashed through his mind that perhaps his fiancée was as cold and deliberate as the other women had said, and after he had remembered that the Cases were no longer wealthy and would depend on him for their future sustenance, and after he had dwelt on the obvious fact that his death would make the girl independent and both herself and her father rich—unless he changed his will. And they knew he intended to.

His nerves were shot.

He was afraid. Afraid of them all—of Mitchell, of his cousin Ralph, of Mary Brookhart, Carey, Bernetta; even of his fiancée and her father and his friend Nelse Dudley; even of Walters since he doubted everyone in the state he was now in.

He was afraid of his shadow.

Afraid of a snapping twig.

Terrified of his servants—whom he had hired for protection.

He was haunted by the man or men in the forest.

He had no place to sleep.

What if *Martha* had done it all?

It wasn't like any other danger he had ever experienced. In Flanders, under the star shells, he had known who his enemy was and where he might come from. In the air he'd seen Maltese crosses on the enemy planes. In the jungle he'd known which beasts to avoid and where to look before you stepped. Excepting Carey, they were urban men. Men raised in cities. But the idea that all office workers are weak and helpless and without courage is a myth. Bailey knew that. Often they were tough—as tough as himself. Tougher.

He wished that he still had one of the planes at the camp. For the first time in his life he knew that he would flee from danger.

It had been going on too long. He had made heroic efforts and accomplished nothing.

Too many exposures to anticipated murder. Suppose, up there on the cliff, the safety rope had broken? Suppose Mitchell hadn't waited to talk? Suppose Walters had pushed the canoe and he'd been unable to loosen the paddle from the bottom quickly enough? Suppose Ralph *had* grabbed the gun and his own had stuck in his clothing? Suppose Mary *had* stabbed and he'd missed her hand? Suppose one of the men

in the woods was *standing out there in the dark right now leveling a rifle at him!*

He had sunk so deeply into his reverie that he had forgotten the people at the table, the clatter of cutlery, the buzz of speculation. He whirled around and jumped to the window.

All the men were on their feet.

Bailey grinned weakly as he realized what he had done. "Thought I heard somebody out there," he said lamely. "Rogers, have the guides take a look around, will you?"

The men sat down. The pounding of hearts slowly returned to near-normal.

"Guess I'm jumpy," Bailey said.

The meal fizzled out.

At eleven o'clock Mrs. Walters thought she would set a precedent. All evening she had tried to entertain and pacify the nervous guests. She yawned magnificently and said, "Well, folks, I think we're making a mountain out of a molehill! Probably those lurking people are perfectly innocent. Don't want to bother us and don't want us to bother them. A professor catching beetles or something like that. I for one am going to bed."

Her husband rose and took her arm. "Me, too," he said. "Good night, Rob. And thanks

for a pleasant trip even though we got no duck."

Bailey was cut out of a bridge game. Evelyn led him to a corner of the room. "You look rotten," she said.

"I'm all right."

She was distraught. Her usually well groomed hair was not smooth. Her eyes were restive, her sports clothes wrinkled. "Look, Robbie—" she began. She was obviously nerving herself to tell him something unpleasant.

"I'm looking. You're a bit fagged yourself."

"I know. I want to talk to you about—"

"What?"

She glanced around the room to see if she were being overheard. She drew a breath. She could not find the spirit to say what she wished. "Nothing!"

"What is it?"

"Nothing at all. Forget it. Why don't you turn in? I think I will."

She said her good nights and went upstairs.

Mitchell called across the room. "Bailey, the bridge is a flop! Suppose you and MacGregor and Dudley and Ralph and the guides and I really work out a scheme for tomorrow's search. That's what is on everybody's mind."

It would be action at



least—action in a house filled with foreboding. Bailey got out a map of the adjacent country—one he himself had made before any were available at Ottawa. The conference lasted an hour.

After that the living room was deserted. Bernetta and Mary had left before the maps were spread out.

The men retired.

In his room Bailey struggled to regain his courage. He turned out the lights and sat down on his bed. He put his holster across his knees, rubbing the place under his arm where its constant pressure had made him numb. I ought to scam, he thought, load a canoe tonight, alone, and get the hell out of here. I could take the Metakawa route. Nobody on that now. Ten days, fast paddling. They couldn't overtake me. In the melee of his agitation he realized that he was again thinking of flight. Flight? Bailey had never fled anything. He excused himself: it would frustrate the killer; it would insure the safety of everybody—including me. God knows what may happen to them with me here! He thought of Stacey.

He tried to whip himself into audacity.

He couldn't.

There was a faint sound out on the porch roof.

His fingers slipped around his gun. His hair bristled. He held his breath. He crept across the floor, raised his eyes up to the window sill.

In the starlight he saw a silhouette. A person pressed against the wall. Sitting. The glint of a gun in the person's lap. A person in a dress.

"Beth!" he whispered.

He felt rather than saw her flinch, and Beth's voice came whispering back, soft, controlled. "Good evening, Captain."

Silently he opened the screen and climbed out beside her. He sat close. His back was also pressed against the wall. He dropped his gun into his lap. "You precious fool," he whispered.

Her head nodded. "Did I tell you about being in love with you when I was six years old? I was pretty, too. No braids. No freckles. I'm a much more attractive sentry than you've ever had."

"And much more likely to get killed."

"Nonsense!"

The violence of his mood departed. He could hear the lake and see the stars and smell the pines. In place of his fear came a memory of the kiss he had given Beth. Strange girl. Wonderful girl. He considered taking her hand. That consideration was the impetus for a

chain of surprising thoughts. If I take her hand I'll kiss her. She wants me to. She really loves me. In some primitive, reliable, terrific way.

She doesn't mind sitting all night in the frost outside my window. She wouldn't care where we went. She'd sail or scramble through the jungle or sit at the head of a table with six wine glasses at her place and those same incredibly clear eyes, that same funny riot of bobbed hair. If I went away she'd wait patiently. When I came back she'd be there.

And Evelyn. A different code. A different feeling about life and people. An idea of love that is only an idea, not an emotion. If I took Beth's hand now, she'd want to be kissed. So he didn't bother to take her hand

After he had kissed her for a long time he felt strong again. He murmured, "We know all about this, don't we? So we won't have to say anything."

He felt her nod against his lips.

"But first we've got to clear up this trouble."

Another nod.

"And then I've got to square it with Evelyn—"

Her hair brushed his lips.

"You know just what I'm like, don't you? And what life with me will be like?"

She answered, "Just the same way you know about me."

Much later he said, "Look, dear. I nearly cracked up tonight. You came along just in the nick of time. But I'm all right now. I want you to go to bed. That's an order."

"All right."

"And sleep."

"I will."

He stood on watch while she returned to the hall. There was a light burning at the far end. All the bedroom doors were closed. They heard Mrs. Walters laughing softly in response to something murmured by her husband. In the next room Evelyn was arguing with her father. Opposite those rooms were his own and Carey's. His partner was snoring . . .

Bailey shut the window of his room. It was the one from which Beth had observed his first secret trip into the woods. He was alive again. He had his courage back.

Finding Beth, and admitting his love for her, made Bailey want to give immediate expression to his changed view of life. It flooded him with vitality. By the time he reached his room he already had a plan. The night lay before him; in it he could solve the mystery of the men in the woods. From the dock he would survey the lake. If that

were fruitless, he would stand watch on the top of Knob Hill. Certainly, in the dawn, he would see their breakfast fire, or the distant dot of their canoe on one of the nameless lakes in the district.

Ten minutes later, wearing his moccasins, a gun in his holster, a flashlight in his pocket, he was sliding across the long field to the dock. He took up a post there, in the dark, the quiet, the starlight, his elbows on a rail, his eyes and ears straining toward the night.

As the minutes slipped by he found his mind working clearly, whereas in the past few days his mind had been a blur, and only violent action had preserved his sanity. Now he was thinking.

He was also aware of a difference. Action was his instinct, reflection a secondary result of his training and experience. But now he *wanted* to think. He was even amused at the unanalytical manner in which he had met his dangers. He had not tried to outreason his assassin, but to outface and outshoot him.

Perhaps a little more intelligence applied to his present quest would be revealing. With that premise he began to wonder who the men in the woods could be, and who could have made the contact necessary to tell them that their first

effort to kill him had been a failure. Almost everyone had gone hunting or fishing at one time or another. The servants were watchers—but no one had watched them. Thus, conceivably, anyone might have found several opportunities to make contacts with the unknown campers. Rogers or Nelse or Carey or Mitchell or Mary Brookhart or Bernetta or the guides. Ralph or Walters. Plenty of opportunity. Opportunity even to—

"By golly!" he whispered.

Anyone could not only have held secret meetings with the campers, anyone could have *been* the campers.

Ralph, say. Ralph could easily have built that fireplace himself and left the rice and raisins. The shot during the burial service? Bailey grinned. Ralph could have arranged it hours before it happened. Any ingenious kid could have done it. A gun with a hair trigger, a piece of string, an alarm clock set to go off and wind up the string at a certain time. And the fire in the woods? If Ralph, for example, had gone into the woods the previous night with an empty alcohol can, a shell, and a hatchet, he could have cut the spruce bed and the tent pegs, left the metal items, and then fixed the "campsite" to catch fire hours later, by setting

a candle burning on a heap of tinder and fuel. A cinch!

It was, Bailey said to himself, high time that he quit maneuvering and did some thinking.

The motive behind such tricks was simple. They would increase the general apprehension and inhibit effective counteraction. But, primarily, they would form a perfect alibi for a murder yet to take place.

Softly he whistled. The assassin could now kill him with impunity. The deed would be attributed to the "men in the woods." So would Stacey's death. A search would be made for those men. Trading posts would be watched. Airplanes would comb the wilderness waterways. Rewards would be offered. But they would never be found—because they did not exist.

And the real murderer would go scot-free—aiding in the search, laughing at the searchers, beyond danger, beyond the law.

Granting the accuracy of that suspicion, what was his next move? A night on Knob Hill now appeared futile to the Captain. The explanation he had come up with was fabulous, but it fitted. He blamed himself for not having used his brain earlier, for not having adequately appreciated that the person

trying to kill him was cool and clever. In fact, all his guests were intellectual, not just violent. The subtlety Bailey had used was not subtle, really. It was childish. A soldier's method, not a schemer's.

The thing to do was to go back over everything, from the first, in the light of his new concept. A person clever enough to make the murder attempts in New York which had put him so dramatically on guard would also be imaginative enough to fake the "men in the woods." A person clever enough to try to poison him or to dress up as a woman and attempt to smash him against an elevated pillar on Sixth Avenue . . .

He'd have to re-think everything.

He had been standing still. But at that instant he froze. He held his breath. He knew who the killer was. As he exhaled he murmured into the night, "Those elevated pillars! Nelse knew about them! *Nelse!*"

Something dug into his back and a voice said harshly, "Put your hands up, Rob!"

Bailey slowly raised his arms, slowly turned around. He'd remembered just too late—remembered that while the entrance to his office was on Fifth Avenue, the car had not tried to run him down until he

had walked a block over to Sixth. And Nelse, on his first day at the Lodge, had involuntarily said something about "chasing you around elevated pillars." The picture had been so vivid in the Captain's mind that he had not wondered how Nelse had known that little detail—until this moment. He'd been too deeply absorbed in his own plot to discover and trap the killer.

And now Nelse was standing in front of him with a gun. Now it was too late. The lawyer had chosen this moment, had crept up soundlessly behind him, and was ready. He could see Nelse's face, fixed with a calm, grim smile. He knew that Nelse expected him to spring—so that would be useless. But with the hopeless desperation of anyone in his position he tried to stave off the last instant.

He didn't raise his voice. "I figured it a bit late, didn't I?" His smile was rueful.

Nelse appeared to be unhurried. "It was touch and go. I've been wondering when you would recall that slip of mine. You know, Rob, I like you a lot. Admire you. And I'd enjoy knowing that you died with a full understanding of the fact that your death was brought about by a better man. I'm not pressed for time. But don't yell or move."

Bailey felt his chest rise and fall. He realized that his mind was churning, piecing things together, thinking against time. "I see. But I guess I've doped it all out now. You dressed in a woman's clothes and drove the car. You poisoned the dessert. Did you also arrange to have Mary Brookhart on the scene? Waiting to meet you in my office, eh?" He watched the lawyer's nod. "And you arranged for the shot and the fire and the rice and raisins in the woods?"

"All three." Dudley pushed hard on the gun. "Look, Rob. Move sidewise to the end of the rail. Then you'll fall in the water. And because I do respect you I'm going to give you a choice. Head or heart?"

"Thanks." It was a dry syllable. The Captain moved along the rail. "What is it? A forty-five? All right. Between the eyes, then." His manner changed imperceptibly. He became even more eager to continue this last-minute discussion. "I've liked you, too, Nelse. Look. Why? I never did you dirt."

He knew the answer, more or less. He could read it in the lawyer's steadiness, in his repressed amusement. The Captain edged farther, and watched for his chance. Any chance. To strike, grab, dodge, get away

from the digging muzzle of the gun.

"You've already mentioned the motive, Rob. Money. Simple as that. I'm facing ruin. Disgrace. The fact that I'll get a big chunk of your estate will hold off my creditors—save me from prison, among other things. You're my only out. Hate to kill you. I hate to, but I must."

"Why couldn't you have asked me for help, Nelse?"

"Because you'd have inevitably found out a lot of things about me no living man is ever going to know."

"That bad, eh? I'm sorry."

"Get ready."

"May I ask one more question? Just curiosity?"

Nelse was beginning to pant. Was the game lasting too long for his disordered nerves? "Quickly!"

The Captain didn't hurry. "When you shoot—and the people in the Lodge notice you're missing—won't they logically suspect—"

"Do you think I'm a fool!" That notion amused the lawyer. "Remember the beaver Carey and Evelyn caught? My door's locked. My bath is running into the tub, with the plug out. The beaver is tied to the faucet, struggling, splashing now and then. I shoot. People start out here to see what happened.

Before they think to get me, I'm back in the bath—up the pine, over the porch, through your room. I've watched you—frequently. You see? A half dozen people will swear that I was in the tub all the time—if it's ever necessary!"

Bailey's voice was as dulcet as a summer wind. "All right, Nelse. I guess you're holding all the aces. All but one. Beth—Mrs. Walters' maid—with a rifle in her hands—is standing two feet behind you!"

Dudley turned to look. The Captain's fist knocked his revolver into the water. Beth's rifle flashed, and a bullet grazed the murderer's skull. The Captain's other fist landed on his jaw with lightning speed and bone-splitting force.

She still clung to the rifle when she went into Bailey's arms. "I disobeyed orders," she whispered. "Sort of." She shook like a leaf. He held her. She went on whispering as lights and voices in the house broke through the night. "I heard his tub running over for a long time. I knocked. His door was locked. I got in a window. The beaver had stopped up the outlet with his tail. So I knew it was him and he was out here after you. I grabbed the gun in the living room. I was going to look in the woods, where you've been sleeping. But I

heard your voices. Oh!" It was an agonized word. "An eternity went by while I crawled up on the dock!"

He touched her shoulder. "Yeah. I saw you coming. A thousand eternities!"

It was a considerable time later in the night, and everyone was having sandwiches and coffee in the living room when Evelyn found an opportunity to speak to Bailey alone.

"I've seen what's happened to you and Beth," she began.

He nerved himself to try to explain. But Evelyn kept talking. "I'm glad. Terribly glad! I've been so wretched! You see, it's happened to me, too! It's Carey. I love him, Rob."

He was bursting then with happiness. He wanted to tell them all. He banged on his cup with a spoon and stood up. "Friends," he called. And he knew they were all his friends. He no longer had an enemy among them.





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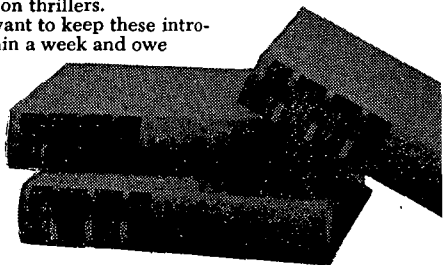
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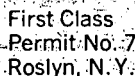
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